



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

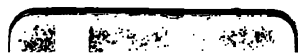
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

AT THE SIGN
OF THE
GUILLOTINE

BY

HAROLD SPENDER





AT THE SIGN OF THE GUILLOTINE

a





AT THE SIGN OF THE GUILLOTINE

BY
HAROLD SPENDER

London
T. FISHER UNWIN

1895



A black and white line drawing of a street scene. On the left is a multi-story building with a shop on the ground floor. A sign is mounted on the building, featuring a guillotine and the words 'AT THE SIGN'. Two men are standing on the cobblestone street in front of the shop. One man is wearing a hat and a long coat, and the other is wearing a hat and a long coat. The sign is a rectangular frame containing a guillotine. The guillotine is a large machine with a long blade and a bed for the victim. The sign is mounted on a pole that extends from the building. The text 'AT THE SIGN' is written above the guillotine. The guillotine is a large machine with a long blade and a bed for the victim. The sign is mounted on a pole that extends from the building. The text 'AT THE SIGN' is written above the guillotine.

AT THE SIGN OF THE GUILLOTINE

BY
HAROLD SPENDER

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN

1895

[All rights reserved.]

TO
MY MOTHER
LILY SPENDER
WHO TO ALL HER CHILDREN
WAS THE TRUEST GUIDE AND DEAREST FRIEND
FOR THIRTY YEARS
3 Dedicate
THIS BOOK
WHICH SHE READ BEFORE HER DEATH
ON 4TH MAY 1895.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—FLYING FROM THE TERROR.	I
II.—A RETURN.	17
III.—A MEETING.	23
IV.—THROUGH A HALF-OPEN DOOR.	31
V.—ROBESPIERRE.	39
VI.—ARRESTED.	44
VII.—BEHIND PRISON DOORS.	53
VIII.—A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.	65
IX.—A DREAM.	76
X.—A FATEFUL PROMISE.	87
XI.—RELEASED.	98
XII.—A DISCOVERY.	102
XIII.—AN ORDEAL.	113
XIV.—THE EXILES.	124
XV.—EDMUND BURKE.	130
XVI.—THE JACOBINS.	141
XVII.—AN ESCAPADE.	149
XVIII.—A RESCUE.	154
XIX.—‘RIPE ULTERIORIS AMOR.’	163
XX.—FEAR.	169

CHAP.	PAGE
XXI.—OMENS.	175
XXII.—THE FIRST BLOW.	180
XXIII.—A FALL.	187
XXIV.—NEW SCHEMES.	196
XXV.—AT BAY.	206
XXVI.—A LULL.	217
XXVII.—A VAIN APPEAL.	226
XXVIII.—LIKE LUCIFER.	233
XXIX.—A FATED PARTING.	238
XXX.—TOUCHING ZERO.	250
XXXI.—A MEETING.	258
XXXII.—TWILIGHT.	

XXXX -

At the Sign of the Guillotine

CHAPTER I

FLYING FROM THE TERROR

IT was the afternoon of a March day in the year 1794—bright, but cold. The sun was sinking into a great bank of heavy storm cloud, boding little but evil for the following morning, when a big, unwieldy coach lumbered heavily along a muddy road in the district of the Vendée, in western France. The two horses were being driven at their topmost speed, and every now and then a young man, clean-shaven and sharp-visaged, thrust his head out of the window on the left side, and incited the old coachman in no measured terms to quicken his pace. The wheels were richly plastered with mud ; the horses were covered with sweat and foam ; and the great springless vehicle jolted and

jarred in every rut of the primitive track that served for a road. Besides the restless young man, the coach contained one other occupant — old, deeply-lined and white-haired. His years could not be less than three-score and ten, and his face was stamped with an indefinable air of ecclesiasticism.

Not that the wildest surmise could have found in the clothing or external outfit of either passenger a trace of anything removed from the secular. Their long riding-coats were cut in the latest fashion of Revolutionary Paris. Their American beavers, the mark of orthodox Jacobinism, were adorned with the brightest tricolour cockades; their necks were enswathed in red mufflers, and they had already replaced the old-fashioned knee-breeches with the latest Republican trouser; their hair was destitute of powder, and cut short, close to the head, in the manner affected only by the most rigid patriots. Such travellers, in such costume, you might have seen in many parts of France at this moment.

But their movements soon began to indicate that these were very far from being ordinary, commonplace travellers. The young man suddenly pushed his head yet further out of the window, and, shading his eyes, peered forward into the far distance. His glance travelled over long stretches of bare country, covered here and there with a sparse

undergrowth, ending suddenly in thick wood. From that point great waves of trees went rolling down dale and up hill, until the horizon closed with the blue distances of a mighty forest. On the far left there rose into the still air a heavy, thick column of smoke, eloquent of devastation and war—the smoke of a burning village. But he was not looking at the view. His whole attention was caught and fixed by a small knot of figures which could be seen moving at the distance of about two miles, standing out against the brushwood. They, too, seemed to catch sight of the advancing coach, for they suddenly disappeared. The observer withdrew his head quickly, and turned to his companion.

‘There’s no time to be wasted,’ he said. ‘The Vendean outposts are in sight. We must get out of this costume, or we are lost.’

Without stopping to argue the matter, he groped underneath the seat and produced a bundle of clothing, which he proceeded to undo. Their brilliant cockades, their American hats, their long riding-coats—in short, the entire Revolutionary outfit—all was divested in the twinkling of an eye. As each garment was taken off, it was dropped from the window of the hurrying coach, and left by the roadside. When the process was finished, the elder man emerged in the costume of a French Catholic Abbé, and the younger man was revealed

in the wig, knee-breeches, three-cornered hat, and elegant coat and waistcoat of a nobleman of the old school. Each had a blue cockade in his hat, and a third had been handed out to the coachman.

The plain became gradually less bare, and the underwood grew thicker and thicker, as the stubble on a man's cheek gradually passes into a beard. The coach laboured more heavily, and the horses showed clearer and clearer signs of exhaustion. It was impossible that such a pace could be kept up much longer.

All around, silence lay heavily on the woods, and in the west the angry sunset now flamed like fire. And yet, in spite of that mighty blaze, the sun's loss was already felt, and a thin veil seemed to fall over all surrounding objects.

Suddenly, from the womb of this profound twilight silence, there burst an appalling uproar. In a moment the forest seemed alive with men, and what had appeared a desert bristled with defiant life. From every bush there stepped great burly, thick-set giants, dressed in rough peasant costume, with open jackets, trousers and large beaver hats—all browned and hardened with exposure. Some of them were indescribably ragged and dirty, and many had the look of a wild animal in their great eyes. They were armed with every possible weapon, from a pitchfork to a musket of the latest pattern. Fierce enough foes as they

looked—these men who had sprung from the dragon's teeth sown by the Revolution—and though they had been subjected to little common discipline, they seemed to have an intuitive faculty for acting together, born of some tribal instinct. They advanced on the carriage with loud cries.

Meanwhile, the young man had looked out again, with a curious lack of surprise at these strange events. This time he leant forward and loudly shouted out to the coachman to stop. Frightened out of his wits by the noise and the clamour, and expecting every moment to be his last, the old man tugged at the reins and did his utmost to check the horses. But by this time the animals were quite beyond control with fear. They dashed off into a thundering gallop, and the great vehicle behind them lurched and rolled in such a manner that the two occupants were thrown against one another like passengers in a modern railway collision.

But this headlong career was brought to a sudden stop. At any moment it had seemed as if the crowd of heated men around the carriage might break out into a promiscuous fusillade indiscriminately directed on the driver and occupants of the carriage. The men inside were dimly conscious of the great danger, and as soon as they had secured themselves to the sides of the carriage had leant back from the windows to avoid any stray bullets.

But this issue was averted by the act of a prompt Vendean marksman. Dropping on to one knee, he discharged his piece at one of the galloping horses. Struck full in the heart, the poor beast leapt high into the air and crashed down in utter collapse—stone dead. The pace of the other was so great that for a few moments the dead partner was literally dragged along the ground, still attached to the traces. But this could not last long, and after several impotent struggles, in which the coach was all but upset, the second horse stopped also, trembling in every limb. In a few minutes the carriage was surrounded, the traces were cut, and threatening faces appeared at either window. It was not a very pleasant position for the occupants of the coach. With suspicion raging like a disease through the length and breadth of France, it was scarcely probable that they would be accepted on the mere strength of appearances, or that the passport of a cockade would suffice to reassure their captors. Danger was written on the threatening faces of the peasants as they crowded to the doors of the coach.

A happy inspiration came to the younger man—he would adopt the offended part. Opening the door of the coach before it could be touched by their assailants, he stepped out and looked round on their faces with a fine assumption of anger. With the traditional reverence for a

seigneur strong upon them, the Bretons fell back at sight of his costume, and left him standing alone in the centre, where all could see him—a fine aristocratic figure, with an air of inherited power. He hastened to take advantage of the impression.

‘A fine way to treat your friends, my men! Here in the Vendée, at least, we expected to find some refuge from the accursed rebels who have made a reproach and a shame of France! And this is how we are treated! Are you, then, also traitors to your King and your God?’

The words were well chosen, and a confused murmur, betokening doubt and indecision—still further increased by the appearance of the priest—went through the crowd.

‘Who are you?’ shouted one. ‘Whence do you come?’

‘Does not our dress tell its own tale—to you who still have reverence and loyalty in your hearts?’ There was another murmur; but he went on rapidly,—‘Barely escaped from the jaws of yonder tigers, we have driven for bare life, thinking that here, at least, we should get relief and safety! And this is our reception! Show me your captain—let me speak to him—and he will understand.’

The proposal found favour.

‘Yes, send for the captain,’ cried one. ‘The

seigneur is right,' cried another. 'This is a matter for the captain.'

The captain, or leader, as it would be more accurate to call one of those to whose discipline the peasants of the Vendée submitted during those terrible years, was not far off. He had not taken part in the wild rush on the carriage. It was not a business that required much leadership. He was one of the young provincial nobles who had long faithfully administered his estate, and, now that war had broken out, found himself rewarded with the trust and devotion of his tenants. He had taken a command in the army of the Vendée, and for the last two years had been engaged in a conflict where there was little or no quarter shown on either side.

The young man in the coach quickly and instinctively recognised one of his own order, and might have been observed by a close onlooker to draw himself up with a curious motion as the captain came near, with a touch of that class-tribal feeling which prevents men from shaming themselves before their equals in rank.

But except in a certain dignity of deportment, and one or two remnants of gold lace on his dress, there were few traces of noble birth left on the Vendean officer. A man who has fought in some twenty pitched battles has struck soil that lies deeper than class distinction. In his eye and on

his haggard face there was stamped the experience of a man who has grown very familiar with death. He scanned the two travellers with a somewhat weary look. His voice was harsh, and he spoke abruptly and almost rudely.

‘You are perhaps not aware, messieurs, that we are accustomed to regard with suspicion arrivals that come from that direction,’ and he pointed towards the enemy. ‘Your clothes do you credit, but I should like to see them more travel-stained.’

The young man bowed, though he plainly resented the tone.

‘Let me be perfectly frank with you,’ he said. ‘The clothes we have travelled in lie by the side of that road. These we have put on out of deference to the feelings of your admirable followers, and as a sign and symbol of our rank.’

The captain listened politely, but it was impossible to judge from his impassive face whether he believed this account. There was, perhaps, a lingering touch of sarcasm in his reply.

‘It flatters me that you should have dressed so elegantly before coming into our company.’

The refugee replied, rather sharply,—

‘Our reason, sir, should not be very difficult for you to discover. We knew that the methods of warfare in this part of the world were somewhat short and summary, and we feared that you might not have the leisure to go behind appearances

Besides, we had imagined that here, at least, our rank and office would be treated otherwise than as a disgrace.'

'And that rank is—?'

'Perhaps not unknown to you. I have the misfortune to be the Duc de Lemours.'

He uttered a name known to those who opposed the Revolution at that moment as a devoted champion of the Old Order. For years a price had been on his head, and yet, from within the dominions of the Republic, he had carried on a ceaseless war against the faith and practice that he loathed. As he spoke, the peasants instinctively fell back, and took up a more respectful attitude, while their leader's manner visibly changed.

'Then, may I ask by what strange chance we meet at this spot?'

'I am engaged,' he replied, 'in saving a holy priest of God from outrage and death;' and, turning towards the priest at his side, he bared his head and bowed.

The Vendéans were thrilled by this action, and many of them bared their heads also. The captain bowed stiffly, but was otherwise unmoved.

'And *his* name?' he said.

'The Abbé Lemaître, of the District of Arras.'

'A praiseworthy service,' said the soldier, shortly. The refugee raised his head.

'No praise to me,' he said, haughtily; 'it is the

merest humanity. I found this old man hunted like a beast—hiding in the slums of great cities and the recesses of forests—daily on the giddy precipice of death and torture—should I be human if I had not helped him? But alone I could have done little. I was aided by one who, though a Republican, is still a man—aided with passports and secret allies.'

The old Abbé started and turned, as if he heard something for the first time.

The captain interrupted,—

'However aided, it was no mean venture,' he said, still with the same stiff courtesy.

The refugee fell into the tone.

'Yes, but a venture that would still have been impossible but for you.'

And then, with quick emphasis and graphic power, he told the story of their escape; how they had arrived at Nantes disguised as commercial travellers; how, by the help of passports and secret assistance, they had made their way to the rear of the Republican army in the field, and driven a roaring trade in camp-utensils—but how, for a long time, further advance seemed impossible, and they almost laid aside hope of passing the tract of blood and fire which separated their customers, an 'infernal column' of the worst description, from their friends.

But their chance at last came. The 'infernal

column' suffered a bloody reverse at the hands of the despairing Vendéans, maddened with the cruel devastation of a brutal and stupid revenge. Fortunately the Vendéans left the 'Reds' to fall back unpursued. In the confusion of the ensuing retreat these two lagged behind, seized an old coach lying in the inn of a village through which they passed, secured a coachman by lavish bribes, and then struck across country towards the Vendéans. Most of the Republican stragglers whom they had met dismissed them for mad travellers braver than themselves. It had been a rush of a few hours, but it was not until the end that they could safely change their costume and appear in their true colours.

The narrative carried conviction. Its details corresponded exactly with the facts as known to the listeners. The speaker had an air of sincerity which banished scepticism. A deep murmur of approval passed through the throng of peasants as he finished, and they looked anxiously towards their captain to see if he were satisfied.

Accustomed to rapid decision, and now convinced that his doubts were groundless, the Vendéan leader changed his attitude without wasting time on regrets that he did not feel.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I am satisfied. You have trusted in our hospitality, and you may be sure that you will not be deceived. I presume that

your aim, M. le Duc, is to see that this priest arrives safely in England ?'

The Duke bowed.

'That is my desire. A friend—the Marquis de Saens—waits for him there.'

'We will do our best.'

He gave his orders rapidly, picking out three trustworthy men from his force, and sending the refugees back to the main camp with that escort.

.
The dusk was fast falling when they left the outpost, and it was quite dark when they reached the Vendean camp. Their way lay through the thickest part of the forest, penetrated by no road, and scarcely a path worthy of the name—hidden from the ken of all but the native.

Suddenly they came out on a vast assemblage of tents, massed together, without apparent order, in a large clearing of the forest. As they picked their way among a confused litter of tent-ropes, camp-fires, cooking utensils, accoutrements and ammunition, they seemed to be passing through the settlement of some wandering tribe rather than the camp of an army. The darkness was lit up with numberless fires, and round them were grouped motley throngs of men, women and children—whole families together—a nation in arms. Some of these groups were engaged in prayer, others were eating their evening meal,

others were cleaning their muskets or preparing for rest. Everywhere were children—children running to and fro on their bare feet, children playing, children bunched in drowsy bundles on their mothers' laps. They halted before a larger tent than the rest, and, after a hurried consultation, one of the escort went within.

A few minutes afterwards he returned.

'The General,' he said, 'will see you now.'

They lifted the tent door and entered. The interior was barely furnished—a small deal table in the centre, and a camp bed in the corner. Two candles guttered on the table, low in the bottles which served to hold them. A large-limbed man was sitting at the table, poring over a map. As they entered he looked up, and they were almost startled by the great shaggy, lion-like visage, as he looked at them with large, calm, observant eyes. There was a big scar across his forehead, and his dress was that of a peasant of the Vendée.

'You are welcome,' he said, laconically. 'What can we do for you?'

'What we want is lodging for to-night, and to-morrow some guidance on our way to the coast.'

'It shall be done. You can sleep in the tent of my lieutenant, who was killed yesterday. You shall have an escort to the coast to-morrow.'

Calling a member of the escort, he gave a series of rapid instructions. In a few minutes they found themselves comfortably housed in one of the largest tents of the camp.

The Duc de Lemours was well satisfied with his venture. The affair had gone without a hitch, and in a few days he would be able to return to that double life of the sham Republican and Royalist intriguer, with the satisfaction that he had baulked his political enemies of one more victim. But his companion already felt the cold shadow of coming exile. The Abbé had only left Nantes by compulsion, after running a hundred risks—snatched from the very jaws of death by the urgency of his friends, and at the present moment he had a special cause for unrest. He knew that he had been helped by many true men, and he felt a proper gratitude to his allies. But the Duke had dropped a phrase which troubled and puzzled him, and yet aroused a vague hope which he hardly dared to cherish.

For who was this 'Republican friend' that had helped him with money and passports? Could it be one who had walked with him in youth, but had since gone far off into the darkness—the darkness of separation and division? No! it was a mere foolish fancy. Why open that wound afresh? But the thought recurred. He must know before he could sleep. There could be no

reason for secrecy. The Duke's reticence was probably a mere act of carelessness. He would ask.

'Tell me,' he said, speaking very low, turning on his bed of straw, 'tell me who is this Republican friend? Who can be risking the guillotine to help *me*?'

'Why, don't you know?' cried the Duke, in his brisk, cheerful way. 'It is the Deputy Louvier. He is a terrible Red, but has a strange affection for you.'

And there was joy in the heart of an old man that evening, such as the father felt when he saw the prodigal son return over the brow of the hill, mindful of his early home.

CHAPTER II

A RETURN

‘YES, the jury got impatient, and I heard one say that the prisoners were, at any rate, conspiring against his stomach. They were all condemned, and I suppose they are on their way at the present moment.’

‘All condemned? Father, mother, children—all for one offence?’

‘What would you have? One can’t be too nice in a revolution. Justice is a virtue for quiet times.’

‘That was not how you used to talk.’

‘Ah! but I have grown out of all that. I used to think we could do it all so easily—now I am in a hurry. There is no end to it. What we want is file-firing.’

‘But these are men and women—some of them innocent. By such confusion you make martyrs of criminals!’

‘Bah! I am tired of such talk! Let us have vigour—vigour—vigour! You call this Anarchy—well, Anarchy is just what is required.’

The scene was Paris—the Tuileries Gardens,

the 10th of April 1794. The two speakers were seated in front of an open-air *café*. The fiercer of the two—keen-eyed, restless, nervous—spoke rapidly and intensely, throwing off his words with a sort of jerk, as if the motive-power came from the senses rather than the brain. There was a curious impulsive *abandon* about his utterance, and the face gave the key to a strong, emotional, disordered nature, perpetually bordering on hysteria. His name was Collot d'Herbois, one of the chief administrators of the Terror—a member of the Great Dread Committee, the Committee of Public Safety.

The milder speaker stood out in strong contrast. His face bespoke an earnest, scrupulous nature, crossed with waves of doubt—a curious mixture of strength and weakness. He seemed like a man who was treading a dark, difficult road, driven on by duty, and yet away from duty—plodding along with eyes on the goal, but without any joy by the way.

This was the Deputy Bertrand Louvier. He had been away from Paris during the past year in the country of the Cevennes as a 'Deputy on Mission'—a sort of provincial governor in a difficult and troublesome part of France. He had governed firmly but mildly, and had been, perhaps for that reason, abruptly recalled to Paris. He had arrived on the previous day.

Crossing the Tuileries Gardens in his first walk through Paris after a year's absence, he had met Collot returning from one of the trials before the Revolutionary Tribunal. In the old days they had been close friends, for Louvier was a fervent Jacobin, and voted for the execution of the King and against the Girondists. But now he felt out of his bearings. Everyone in Paris seemed to have changed, and Collot with the rest.

Their conversation was suddenly invaded. On the broad walk that ran in front of the *café*, in the bright spring sunshine of a fresh April afternoon, the gay world of Paris, unappalled and undeterred by any troubles, was flaunting its finery, modelled on every age and style, and free from all reverence for any mode. But on the pleasant, laughing, restless murmur of the promenaders there broke the sound of an approaching tumult, and round the corner of the great walk there swept a promiscuous mob, turbulent and noisy. The promenaders fell back to right and left, the young girls daintily gathering up the skirts of their dresses, and the young swells nonchalantly eyeing the crowd through their *lorgnettes*. From long habit, a sort of order within confusion seemed to have sprung up, and there were few who evinced either disgust or surprise.

On the contrary, as the crowd came nearer,

the swells began enthusiastically clapping their hands, and the girls waved their handkerchiefs. For in the centre of a fringe of *canaille*—dirty, unkempt, fierce-faced, men and women and ruffianly youths, with bloodshot, hungry, eager eyes—marched a company of young soldiers, in cross-belts, large hats and blue uniforms, setting out for the war—recruits to fill up the gaps in some hard-hit regiment. Their passage touched a chord in the hearts of all. Intrigues had become wearisome, executions had become tedious, but the war—every Parisian could understand the war!

The volunteers were well pleased. One of them, more excited than the rest, struck up the 'Marseillaise.' Immediately it spread like a fire through the whole company, and was caught up by the onlookers. Men and women sang it with a sort of frenzy—*canaille* and fashionables joining together. The song did not cease till the soldiers passed round the corner and were out of sight.

The two companions at the table of the *café* had seen too many of such sights to express any wonder or to utter any comment. Stopped in their talk, they looked listlessly at the passing crowd—their thoughts far away.

As soon as it had passed they resumed.

'Ah! my Louvier,' said Collot, 'you never were really one of us! You have too much

scruple; you think that it is necessary to be *good* in order to reform the world.'

'Whereas,' answered Louvier, laughing, '*you* have martyred all your virtues in order to do your work better!'

'Yes,' replied the other, with pretended gaiety, though he frowned slightly at the sarcasm. 'And a most self-sacrificing act, too. But tell me,' he went on, suddenly turning on his friend, 'how is it you ever became one of us? Because, you know, really at heart you're an aristocrat.'

Deputy Louvier was not apt to wear the secrets of his life on his sleeve, and he knew that Collot d'Herbois had no friendly intent in this inquiry.

Besides, the question went home. It was the very problem that his conscience had been asking him ever since he had returned to Paris—ever since he left the distant countryside where he had ruled so quietly, loved by a people who daily blessed the Revolution, and rode with his jingling escort from the sunny country outside into this great gloomy city, darkened at mid-day by the black shadow of the Terror. As he came through the city from Saint Antoine he had met a tumbril faring to the guillotine. On it he had seen two deputies famed but a year ago for their Revolutionary sentiments—close co-workers with himself in the Convention! From that moment his heart sank within him.

Yes—why? How did he come to be identified with such men and such acts as these? Why had he turned his back on all the sweet influences of his youth? How did he find himself responsible for crowded prisons and daily massacres? How was it that when he walked the streets of Paris with his Deputy's badge men turned away from him with averted gaze? He felt a sort of vertigo at the issue.

But ah!—he knew why. There came back to him yet once again that early passion of pity for the oppressed and downcast—that hatred of misused power, awakened by the contrasts of the Old Order.

'Because,' he answered, lowering his voice, 'because I loved the poor.'

'And so do we all,' answered Collot. 'Do you remember what St Just says: "War to the palace and peace to the cottage!" That is our motto! Ah! as long as you do that you are one of us.'

They rose together, instinctively feeling that they were both on dangerous ground. Collot excused himself on the ground of some committee, and left Louvier to walk in silence eastwards.

CHAPTER III

A MEETING

LOUVIER walked down the Tuileries Gardens through the gay crowd of promenaders, and past groups of gossips and loafers, thinking deeply. His memory went back swiftly over the past.

There was one scene he remembered above all. It was more than ten years since—in 1783. The sun was low, and the poplars lining the Arras Road threw long shadows, like some tall, pale eremites. He was standing at the cross roads talking with two others—just at the parting of the ways. One was a young nobleman, and the other a priest, the village *curé*, already past sixty, his face deeply scarred by a life of asceticism and devotion to the service of his parish. Ah! he knew their names full well. The nobleman was the Marquis de Saens, and the priest was the (then) Père Lemaître. All three were bound by a common friendship.

They had been talking of the coming time, and the chances of a general 'overturn,' he himself with the enthusiasm of first youth—for he was barely twenty—the young nobleman with a gay, cynical

indifference, and the old priest with a sad foreboding.

‘Ah, M. Louvier,’ the Marquis said, laughingly, as he turned away, ‘if we meet at the Revolution, I shall consider myself lucky if you spare me.’

He remembered how, boy-like, he was struck with the thought. Would he, a mere *bourgeois*, ever have his foot on the neck of such men as that nobleman? He stood looking after him, quickened with dreams of power.

But while he stood thus, gazing into the future, and flushed with the vision, a hand was laid on his arm.

‘And me too, my son—will you spare me?’

It was the voice of his foster-father—the old priest.

It all came back to him so vividly—how he turned round with a ready laugh, but caught the searching look in the steady eyes—how then the laughter turned to tears and he fell on the old man’s neck.

‘Yes, my father—I swear’ (the words recurred as if he had spoken them yesterday)—‘I swear, whatever happens, I will protect *you*.’

How had he kept that pledge?

When he made it he was but a youth on the eve of his career, straining at the leash; about to leave his native town for his legal training in the great distant centre of Paris. Up to that time he had

been affected in every thought, word and deed by the old priest. His own father had died young, and Père Lemaître had more than stood in his place. But he was already affected by the teaching of Voltaire and Diderot, and the priest had a sense of losing his hold.

Ah! he little knew how soon it would break entirely! A pang of remorse shot through Louvier as his mind went swiftly over the intervening years; his utter capture by the new doctrines in the very first year of his stay in Paris; his growing contempt for home and faith and all his past—a contempt so great that never, in all the intervening years, had he visited or written to the old *cure* of Arras. And then had come the years of stress and storm—1789, '90, '91, '92, '93—following one another in quick succession. Plunged in the fire of the Revolution, absorbed by day and by night in political work, Louvier had almost forgotten his past. He had gradually risen from obscurity, until in 1792 he was elected as a deputy of the Convention, where he was known as a fierce enemy of the priests.

But one day, only six months before, while away in the Cevennes, he received a letter which brought it all back. It was unsigned, short, and to the point. The Abbé Lemaître was in danger—would perish unless he helped him. Would he, in memory of past years, give him money and a

passport? Careful instructions were given as to his means of doing it.

A year before he would have refused with anger. But the country peace was on him, and he had time to think. He remembered the old tie, wrote to the Abbé, and gave all that was required. The money reached, but not the letter. After he had done this, he received a dangerous, compromising letter—a letter of thanks from the Marquis de Saens. He had kept it.

If Collot heard of this, where would he be?

Let him hear! The gloom of this mighty terror had touched Louvier too, and as he thought of the faces in the tumbril he almost wished that he might be with them.

Almost, but not quite.

He had emerged from the gardens, and now walked down the Rue St Honoré until he stopped in front of a large house, that reminded one in a curious way of a pious individual who has suddenly broken out into worldliness. It was, in fact, an old nunnery of the Order of the Conception converted into a family residence. The community had been dissolved, and were by this time probably scattered over Europe. Their austere building had been painted and done up, and had blossomed into flowers at the windows, for the convent had become the house of Citizen Maurice Duplay, member of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

Bertrand Louvier looked at his watch. It was four o'clock in the afternoon.

'Yes, she will be in,' he muttered to himself; and he delivered a resounding knock on the great door.

In a few moments it was opened by a bright little servant, who broke into smiles at the sight of him.

'Ah! Ninette,' he said. 'So you see I am back again—and is the Citizeness Duplay within?'

'Yes, Deputy, she is. Ah, *mon Dieu!* she will be pleased to see you.'

A few minutes later the door of the room into which he had been shown suddenly opened, and there entered a young girl in the first freshness of womanhood, simply dressed, her dark hair caught up with a red silken snood.

He rose to meet her.

'Elise!'

'Bertrand!'

It sounded an almost involuntary revelation of feeling; the cry that comes from the heart after long separation and misunderstanding; the flash of meaning that breaks on a twilight of mutual silence, and illumines all—never to be quite dark again.

In a moment they stood facing one another: he watching her keenly with flushed face and parted

lips as one who is on the verge of a great apocalypse, she slightly bashful and confused, her cheeks hoisting a flaming ensign.

In the afternoon glow they made a picture. He had changed the somewhat gaudy costume of his office, and there was little to distinguish him from his fellows, except the somewhat faded tricolour sash and the large cockade in his hat. With the dawn of a new hope, his face seemed to take on a new firmness and force. Her dress, too, was a sort of study in the three famous colours—dark blue with white facings, and a red sash. But, in the struggle towards harmony, the milliner had subdued all the colours, and beauty was by no means sacrificed to patriotism.

When she spoke again it was in a very different tone—as if she had recovered the attitude of conventional restraint.

‘Citizen,’ she said, ‘you are welcome ; you have been absent long ;’ and she held out a hand.

But he was not willing to let the happy moment fly. When again would he be able to pierce beneath appearances, and speak to her, soul to soul ?

It was more than a year since he had seen her last. During the early months of ’93, in the hottest period of political strife, he had been invited to Citizen Duplay’s *salon* and met her for the first time. In a few days he had fallen deeply in love ;

and then had come the summons to the provinces, the long exile, and silence. Before parting neither had spoken a word. But now he knew all. In that slip of the tongue, when she answered him with his *nom de baptême*, she revealed to him the whole secret—the year of long waiting, the joy at his coming.

And so it came about that though she gave him but one hand, he took two.

‘Ah! Elise,’ he cried, ‘you cannot unsay it now. And why should you? The long year is over, and I am at home.’

‘But—but—’

‘No, not but—“yes” is the word. Say that one word, and my poor voiceless heart will sing again! Ah! Elise, do you know what I was saying as I came through the streets of Paris and saw how men hate one another? I was saying—hate rules the world! But if you love me, what care I?’

The girl was still silent, but, with low, downcast eyes, she still listened to the music of his voice. Silence sometimes utters much. Louvier pressed on.

‘Far away in the silence of the hills, when I stood alone responsible for the lives and happiness of thousands, what gave me strength? The thought of you. When the voices whispered to me, that my love for mankind was a sin, and that our work was one mighty blunder, what fortified

me? The hope of your help. Elise!' he cried, 'I cannot live without you. Come to me in my loneliness.'

There was much in what he said that was unintelligible to her. How should she know the despair of great schemes that have failed, or fathom the woe of those who have built on a faith proved vain? How could she see, reflected in his passion, all the experiences of the last two days—the sight of his condemned comrades, the talk with Collot, the sudden realisation of sin, of death, of a world of hatred and sordid strife?

All she knew was that he returned her love; and no lyric ever sounded sweeter in listener's ear than the story of passion that he unfolded. As she heard, her maiden bashfulness gave way before it; the mountains of difficulty which she had foreseen began to disappear; her old fears seemed stupid, wicked.

She could keep silence no longer.

'Yes, Bertrand,' she said, raising her face with a very sweet smile; 'yes, it is true, I love you. Why should I deny it?'

He folded her in his arms.

'The shadow cannot touch me,' he murmured; 'love is the victor.'

CHAPTER IV

THROUGH A HALF-OPEN DOOR

ON the same day, and at the same hour, a daintily-built man, of short stature, was making his way along the Quai de l'Ecole by the side of the Seine, west of the Pont Neuf. As he passed men ran to the windows of the houses to look at him, and women held up their children to gaze.

It would have been difficult not to have been struck by his appearance. In dress and manner he stood out in almost utter distinctness from all others who were passing by. It was the fashion to say that 'powder had emigrated,' but on his head there was an elaborate, freshly-powdered peruque—a small wig—while in place of the prevalent American beaver, English swallow-tail and democratic trouser, he still wore the tight-fitting knee-breeches, silk coat and three-cornered hat of an earlier time. An immaculate cravat supported his chin, and the only sign of

the new time was the little cockade in his hat. There was a man with a will of his own.

As he walked an excited workman would suddenly stop and, waving his hat wildly in the air, ecstatically and almost hysterically shout his name. At one point in his progress, a small body of men collected, and effusively offering themselves as a bodyguard, were only reluctantly persuaded to leave him by his expressed desire to be alone.

He walked leisurely down the quay past the Pont Neuf and the Pont Notre Dame, smiling kindly on some little children who greeted him with infantile huzzas, and bowing courteously in reply to the many greetings of his admirers. There was no sign of ungentleness or brutality about his well-set figure, or the sharp features and keen eyes of his small face. The impression left both by his dress and manner was one of extreme self-complacency. But his eyes had in them, now and again, a curious look of dreamy sentimentalism, such as is often seen in men who wall themselves off from the world by a happy barrier of self-illusion.

For this man was Maximilien Robespierre.

He walked on without turning as far as the Quai de la Grève, and then, turning abruptly to the left, away from the river front, plunged into the little network of by-streets that lay

between the river and the great central main arteries of Paris. As he left the throng behind him, he quickened his steps, as if to avoid being followed. Turning rapidly, first to right and then to left, he entered a small silversmith's shop, politely taking off his hat. The shopkeeper, a comfortable, rubicund *bourgeois*, who did not seem to have lost flesh by the Revolution, was almost overcome by the honour done to him. Rubbing his hands and bowing repeatedly, he came hurrying up to his customer.

'Ah! Citizen Robespierre,' he cried, 'this is indeed a pleasure! It is not in vain, then, that I am so careful always to have my ticket of citizenship, and to post my list on the door. I am rewarded tenfold for keeping to the prices of our blessed Maximum ever since the beginning of Januar—'

'Pluviose, you mean,' said Robespierre, frigidly, for he was very particular about the new calendar.

'Oh! pardon, pardon—a thousand pardons! But, citizen, I have such a bad memory. I was only saying to my wife last Sunday—'

'Last Décadi, citizen,' said the great man again, equally cold; and so at last checked the garrulity of the shopkeeper, who really began to fear for his neck.

Robespierre's purchase was a small bracelet of filigree silver, very delicately worked. Having chosen it, he took a small handbook from his

pocket and carefully searched out the fixed State price for silver articles. Then, with great precision, he laid the exact sum on the counter, much to the chagrin of the seller, who was not used to such well-informed customers.

Leaving the shop he did not return to the quay, but picked his way, with all the familiarity of an old Parisian, through the maze of dirty and ill-paved streets, across the Rue St Denis, into the Rue St Honoré. It was not a very cleanly walk. From time to time he had to stand aside, along with other passengers, under the overhanging eaves of the houses, to avoid the wheels of passing carriages. It was a poor quarter, and these back streets were full of loafing, gaping cowards and fanatics, and Revolutionary busy-bodies. These were the so-called *sansculottes*. Never did the world before or since see stranger costumes than these people wore. They were mostly in *sabots* and workmen's trousers. Many of them wore loose jackets, others loose riding-coats, all with their shirts open at the throat, or covered with dirty rough woollen neckcloths. Their hair was long, and many of them still had on the red woollen caps which the Parisian had imitated from the freed Swiss galley-slaves in 1792.

Others, called '*carmagnolers*,' seemed to be dressed in every variety of the three colours—blue jackets, white waistcoats and red trousers, with

caps of blue cloth bordered with red. All were light-hearted as the day, and possessed with a continual fever of gaiety and exhilaration, singing, shouting and laughing. Those who recognised Robespierre greeted him with loving nicknames, or loud, familiar welcomes, to which he paid little attention, but hurried on as if with a fear of being detained. He did not care for this kind of thing. His love of the people stopped on this side of the unwashed.

The streets were largely redeemed from their squalor by the gay patches of colour on the sign-boards that swung over most of the shops, and by the crossing chains of the great lanterns, useful for many purposes. The houses were mostly of wood, but this did not detract from their picturesqueness. The cowl-like roofs and projecting upper-storeys gave Paris a mediæval look, that almost made one forget its squalor.

At last Robespierre emerged into the broader and cleaner thoroughfare of the Rue St Honoré, opposite the Rue Delphine. Without turning to right or to left, he crossed the street and stopped at the door of the house of Citizen Duplay. He took a small latch-key from his pocket, and prepared to open the door. For Robespierre was Citizen Duplay's lodger, and he had a special object in returning from the Convention so early.

He had decided to marry, and, after much

thought, he had fixed his choice on none other than Elise Duplay.

He entered the hall, and, passing through the *salon*, crossed the courtyard round which nestled the great quadrangular building. He knew that Elise was fond of sitting during the afternoon in a small, well-lighted room overlooking the Rue Delphine, a favourite sitting-room. He would probably find her there now.

Entering the further side of the building, he climbed a flight of stairs, and came to a stand in the passage leading to the room for which he was bound. His steps were light and dainty, and it would have been difficult for the quickest ear to detect his approach. The door was slightly ajar, and he was able to look in without being seen. Pleasantly exhilarated by the anticipations of the moment, he stood and waited with a smile, every sense alert.

But the smile died out as a sound of voices within struck upon his ear. They were the voices of two persons engaged in intimate converse—the voice of a man, and the voice of a woman. Young voices both, and one of them the centre of all his hopes. But, though the instrument was the same, how different the tune! Alas! he had never been the Orpheus to draw forth such harmonious emphases and measured cadences! Every voice has a love-music; but it requires a player.

He was too late. Those were the tones of one who had already given away her heart.

But to whom? She had ceased speaking; it was now the man's turn. Robespierre crept nearer, and listened more intently.

'The dark night has passed'—so the voice spoke—'and I have come to claim my reward. Ah! Elise, we have kept our secret too long—even now I feel as if someone might come between us and snatch you from me—'

'Ah, no!'

It was her voice.

'Yes, love, for you are beautiful, and beauty is a rare prize. There are few things men will not do for it. Promise, love. Promise to marry me immediately, and the world shall know to-morrow.'

There was a long pause, and then from the silence came three words, softly uttered by the voice he knew.

'Yes, I promise.'

'Next week?'

'Yes, next week.'

With infinite ingenuity, softly gliding with the motion of some beautiful snake, Robespierre managed to obtain a view of the pair through the half-open door. They were sitting at the further end of the room by the great window, on a low settle that ran round the big recess, and the afternoon sunlight, streaming through the window,

fell full on the face of a young man who was holding the hand of Elise, as if with the right of possession.

Robespierre recognised him. It was Bertrand Louvier.

CHAPTER V

ROBESPIERRE

WITHOUT a sound, Robespierre glided rather than turned away, and mounted the narrow stairs to his private room—a small, plainly-furnished, chamber on the third storey of the great house, which served him both for work and sleep. On the hearthrug lay a large Danish jagdhund, which slowly uncurled itself, and rose to greet him with a great profusion of affection. But he was in no mood for such feelings, and, thrusting the dog aside, began to walk restlessly to and fro, grappling with his deep and bitter chagrin.

The pile of letters laid ready for him by his secretary remained unopened, his half-written speech remained untouched, and the open volume of Rousseau was left where it lay, on the embroidered coverlet of his small camp bed.

Robespierre had not made a good lover. Self-absorbed in the sentimentalism of his own passions,

he had forgotten that in romance, as in war, it takes two to play the game. Love had been to him a decorous drama, in which he filled the front of the stage, while the girl played a secondary and submissive part outside the glare of the footlights. She had been the ornamental fringe to his existence—a picturesque idyll, hardly gifted with a separate will or personality. He looked to find in her not a partner in danger, but a resting-place after storm, built for his special harbouring.

This complacent confidence in his own powers had not lent strength to his wooing. It ignored the chief factor. It expected a surrender without a conquest, a victory without a battle. But Elise had only seen twenty summers. She was a graceful and charming brunette, and the house was the centre of many gaieties, and the resort of many young Deputies. Such fortresses are not won without a storm.

As it was, she did not even recognise the attack. Robespierre's prim and stately courtesies, which were to him the classic trappings of a romantic devotion, were accepted by the young girl as the somewhat eccentric politeness of provincial society, while his frequent gifts of flowers, each marking a stage in his own pilgrimage of passion, amused her fancy rather than touched her heart.

But now, that glimpse through the half-open door had turned his decorous and idyllic affection

into a dangerous and imperious passion—a burning desire to have and possess. The volcano had broken through the snow. He was still young—only thirty-five—and it was his first experience of real passion. And so, in that half-hour, his mind was the stormy cock-pit of a desperate conflict, in which injured self-esteem and baffled desire fought against all that was left of his better nature.

Hitherto, he prided himself, he had never slain an innocent man ; for, to his judgment, a political foe was necessarily a criminal. ‘All I punish are guilty,’ he would say. But how could he justify the deed now taking shape in his inmost thought ? Would it not be the merest murder ?

He stopped in his feverish walk. A recollection seemed to flash on him. Taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he turned towards a small cabinet in a corner of his room. It was carefully padlocked, but he soon opened it with the smallest key on the bunch. The door swung back and revealed a series of small drawers, marked with the letters of the alphabet.

It was Robespierre’s secret cabinet.

Passing his finger down, he stopped at the letter L, and drew out the drawer. From the contents, after careful search, he picked out a letter, which he carefully perused. He then gave a sigh of relief, and there was the faintest shadow of a smile on his thin lips. He walked to the table and penned

a short note, and then enclosing the other, hastily folded and addressed it. He rang a small hand-bell, and waited.

A knock at the door was followed by the entrance of his secretary, Simon Duplay—a young man who had proved his fervour by the loss of a leg at Valmy, and now stumped awkwardly on a wooden substitute. This did not prevent him from being the most cheerful and enthusiastic of beings, and even Robespierre felt his genial influence.

‘Ah, Simon,’ he cried. ‘Ah, Simon, how goes it with you to-day?’

‘Very well, master,’ replied Simon, gaily.

‘Any callers?’

‘Very few, master. There was the lady whose husband, as you know, is in the Conciergerie for necessary reasons. I told her that, if she came again, she would be sent there after him. And there was the mother of that child who was so imprudently guillotined by—’

‘*Bête ! Cochon !*’ cried Robespierre, with disgust. ‘But we shall not be troubled by him any more. Did you give her the *assignats*?’

‘I did, master.’

‘Did she seem satisfied?’

‘Not completely.’

Robespierre made an impatient movement. Really, people were too unreasonable.

‘Are you free this afternoon?’

‘I am always free for your service, master.’

‘Then, I wish you to take this note to the house of Fouquier Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, and to tell him to arrest, with all possible speed, Deputy Bertrand Louvier, of the Province of Artois.’

The document, which Robespierre had taken from his secret drawer, was the letter from Louvier to the Abbé Lemaître—that letter which, as we have seen, never arrived. It had been intercepted by Robespierre’s police, laid aside, and almost forgotten.

CHAPTER VI

ARRESTED

‘WELL, Jean, and is my dinner ready?’

‘Yes, Citizen Louvier; you are late.’

‘I’ve been detained, you rascal—detained on important business, as you will be some day. But *vite!* stir your legs! I must be at the Tuileries in an hour.’

It was five o’clock, and Louvier had returned to his rooms in boisterous spirits, which he took no trouble to conceal from the young French peasant whom he brought with him from the Cevennes as man-of-all-work. There were hundreds of others who would gladly have followed Louvier to Paris, for he was a true democrat, and found his way to the hearts of the people. Many a blustering demagogue of the time often envied him his power, and the good peasants of the Cevennes, inured to the hard brutality of absentee landlords, had greeted him with effusion, and ended almost with adoration.

Jean brought in a steaming dish of soup and laid it on the plain deal table. Like most deputies, Louvier was exceedingly poor, and lived in Spartan simplicity. He was not a vegetarian, as were many of the Jacobins, any more than he followed many of his friends in their ascetic enthusiasm for Free Love. For he had many saving touches of sanity, or, perhaps, he would never have arrived so far.

Louvier was so far affected by the passion for a 'return to nature,' which so largely entered into the revolutionary faith, that the whole tenour of his life had been rigorously simplified. The room in which he sat had no carpet except a plain drugget in the centre. There were no ornaments beyond the bookshelves. A desk by the window was covered with maps and despatches; for he had to go to the Tuileries that evening and present a report of his year's work.

Returning to Paris, he had gone back to the rooms which he occupied a year ago, and which he had originally taken on account of their nearness to the Convention—and to Elise. They lay a little further east in the same street—the Rue St Honoré.

But as he looked round the narrow room now, he began to experience a new feeling of limitation. *They* would want larger rooms. He could not ask her to live with him here.

For why should they delay their marriage? He

would ask her father to-morrow; the new civil process was simple and quick, and the authorities at the Hôtel de Ville put no obstacles in the way of happy lovers. Her promise might become a reality—they might be married in a week.

Dazzled with the prospect, he poured out a glass from the bottle of Burgundy which Jean had placed at his side, and raised it to his lips.

‘Here’s to our union!’ he cried.

But the glass had not touched his lips when his ears were assailed by a din of importunate knocking on the big door below. The knocks seemed to be dealt with authority, if not with menace. Louvier stopped, with the glass half raised to his lips, and, slowly lowering his hand, sat listening.

The knocks were repeated with redoubled urgency. The uproar became continuous. It was followed by the sound of a violent altercation, from the midst of which Louvier could catch the tone of a familiar voice. His faithful servant had opened the door, but was disputing the right of entry with someone not inclined for a refusal.

Louvier rushed to the window. Across the street a little group of passers-by stood and gazed with silent curiosity and perhaps a touch of fear. On the pavement below stood a company of National Guards with fixed bayonets. Their red and blue uniforms seemed to fill the street

with colour, and their cocked hats gave them an imposing look of power.

A moment afterwards and the altercation below ceased. It gave place to a clamour of resounding steps on the staircase.

Louvier resumed his seat. Whatever happened he would show a brave front.

But what could it all mean? There flashed back upon him the rapid recollection of all the events of the day; his meeting with Collot in the gardens, his imprudent talk, and Collot's own obvious disapproval. He saw it all—he had become a 'suspect'! Ah! He knew only too well what was implied in that dreadful word!

A few hours before he would have faced his fate without flinching, but for the moment the transition from joy to calamity came upon him with a crushing force. The steps on the stairs became to his imagination the knell of all his happiness, and through his own woe he seemed to look down into the deep revolutionary whirlpool of unmerited agony and undeserved death.

The darkness of dreadful night swept over him. Had it all any meaning? He seemed for the moment a mere soulless accident in a soulless universe, the casual sport of ruthless forces, that mocked men with an illusion of God and justice while they pursued their endless dance of doom—chaos to chaos and death to death.

Rap! rap! rap! The knock at his own door roused Louvier from the mood of morbid horror into which he was falling. He gave a half laugh.

'After all, what does it matter?' he muttered to himself. 'One can only die once.' And then, helping himself from the dish before him with perfect calmness, Louvier called '*Entrez!*' to his uninvited guest, and, as he came in, looked up with a well-affected surprise.

There entered a big warrior, with broad tricolour sash and hat of waving plumes. Louvier instantly recognised an old friend, a Parisian brewer named Sierre, who had been touched with revolutionary enthusiasm, and had taken off his leather apron to become a warrior. Much to his own joy he had risen to the rank of captain.

Louvier rose politely to greet him.

'Ah, is it you, Sierre?' he cried, laughing; 'it is not often that I am honoured by your company now. Have you been attracted, *mon ami*, by the excellent vintage of this wine, good enough to make any brewer shake with envy? Come, sit and drink with me,' and he poured out a second glass. 'But you seem preoccupied. Mars is intent on war, and scorns Bacchus. *Ma foi*,' he went on, as a big, burly guardsman came into the room, and stood 'at attention' by the door, 'but you are well escorted. To what may I attribute the honour of this official visitation?'

The rough, honest brewer was a little disconcerted with this reception. He liked Louvier, and found his duty by no means congenial. He continued standing, playing awkwardly with the end of his moustache, and looking clumsily about the room.

‘I am sorry, citizen, not to be able to avail myself of your hospitality. But, the fact is, the errand on which I have come is less pleasant than I could have wished.’ He paused, but at length spoke again, ‘Citizen, you are a suspect, and I am sent to arrest you in the name of the Republic.’

So saying, he stepped forward, laid the warrant of arrest on the table, and placed his hand formally on Louvier’s shoulder.

Louvier took up the warrant and closely scanned it. It was an order to arrest him on the charge of conspiring against the Republic by assisting in the escape of a priest known as the *ci-devant* Abbé Lemaître. It was signed in the name of the Public Prosecutor, and authorised Sierre to take him to the prison of the Abbaye.

Louvier put down the warrant without a word. The blow had come. He saw all now. He must pay the penalty of human pity and kindness. He turned to his captor.

‘I would remind you of one thing,’ he said, with a touch of pride, ‘I am a Deputy, and the law gives me the protection of the Convention—’

Sierre gave a laugh.

‘And so you trust to that?’

Louvier drew himself up.

‘Remember,’ he said, ‘that the Convention is the people.’

‘Nonsense, my dear citizen; the Convention only cares for itself. You are one, and may go—’ and he drew his hand suggestively across his throat.

‘But you will require leave—’

‘And shall get it to-morrow after the event!’

Louvier drew in his breath. So this was what law had come to in France! But it was futile to be angry with this agent of stronger powers. He restrained himself, and, when he spoke next, it was with a measured calmness.

‘Sierre,’ he said, ‘I do not blame you for this, but I would ask you to do one act of justice. Here I am accused of crimes against the Republic. These rooms are my best witnesses.’

Sierre looked round inquiringly.

‘My boxes—my desks,’ went on Louvier, ‘are all crowded with papers proving my integrity—crowded with articles, with speeches, with letters, all written on behalf of the Republic. Search my rooms. If I go before the Tribunal, let me go supported by this, the best evidence of my innocence.’

Louvier was playing a desperate game, for he knew that the soldiers might possibly come across the most incriminating evidence, but he wanted to gain time. He could not bear that he

should disappear from the world, perhaps never to be heard of again, without having sent to Elise some message, some parting hint of the reason for his disappearance.

Sierre was anxious to do his work with as little friction as possible, and willingly consented to the search. Placing a soldier at Louvier's door, he left the room.

Louvier hurriedly rose and went to his *escritoire* by the window. It was still open, and on the flap were lying the sheets of an article which he had been writing during the morning for one of the innumerable journals that had sprung up in Paris during the last four years, and gave a certain amount of work to Louvier as to so many other impecunious Deputies. He pushed aside the article, and wrote rapidly on a small sheet of paper. Time was too short for endearments. Never was a lover's letter so curt and to the point.

'I am arrested. Sierre is here with a warrant, and I go to-night to the Abbaye. You may never see or hear of me again. Forget me and be happy. —Thine ever,
LOUVIER.'

With incredible rapidity Louvier closed and sealed the note, fastening it together in such a manner that it might be carried in the very smallest space—for a man does not live in a

Revolutionary time without learning a few things. He then searched in his pocket for some change, selected a gold' piece, and walked with apparent nonchalance to the door.

The guardsman at first made some show of virtuous refusal. But the times were hard, and gold was scarce ; it was hard work keeping a family on depreciated paper money ; before anything had been said, his hand had moved—almost unconsciously—to take the coin and the letter. Louvier muttered his instructions in a low voice.

‘Leave this at the corner house of the Rue Delphine—the old Convent of the Conception. Do it as you pass. No one will see you.’

A few moments after, Sierre rushed into the room, waving a letter in his hand.

‘This will do for you!’ he cried. ‘I should not like to prophesy what the Tribunal will say to this, *mon ami*.’

And he held the letter before Louvier’s eyes.

In spite of himself, Louvier’s heart stopped still with a great fear. For the letter was from the Marquis de Saens—that fatal letter of gratitude which he had never had the heart to destroy.

A reaction of indifference came over him.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘let us go. The State offers me a free lodging. Why should I refuse it?’

In a few minutes they were in the street.

CHAPTER VII

BEHIND PRISON DOORS

SUCH a march as that of Louvier and his escort was too common a sight in the streets of Paris at that time to attract very much attention. As the soldiers tramped by the crowded *cafés* and through the gay groups of strolling, laughing Parisians that seemed to gather round such public places, as if for company in danger, the little procession was allowed to go on its way for the most part unheeded. A group of red-capped Jacobins, lounging in front of the hall of a Revolutionary Committee, threw up their caps and shouted insulting words at the prisoner, and a small troop of soldiers trudging out of Paris indulged in humorous comments upon his destination.

‘He will sneeze through the little window tomorrow,’ shouted one.

‘*Ah ! Madame Guillotine va bien,*’ shouted another.

‘Yes, she has a healthy appetite,’ cried a third, ‘and she’s getting less fastidious. In the old days she’d eat nothing but a noble or a king; but now she’ll have the humblest of us,’ and the gibes of the humorists caused shouts of rather forced laughter from the loiterers.

As Louvier passed along, he fancied that he noticed here and there a furtive look of sympathy or pity — haply from someone who, though not allowed to wear mourning, had lost a relative under the guillotine. But for the most part the attitude of the average Parisian was one of a safe indifference. Most of the drinkers at the *cafés* turned away their faces and pretended to be otherwise interested, anxious not to reveal their feelings to any possible spy by the merest look or unconscious expression of face. For it was a time when a sympathetic look might mean death.

When Louvier arrived on the Île de Paris, he and his escort passed by Notre Dame without turning aside towards the great prison of the Conciergerie, and wheeled down the newly-named Rue de Thionville towards the Abbaye.

The Rue de Thionville was crowded with rough-looking loafers, many in rags, who haunted the gates of the prison with a greedy appetite for sights of suffering. As they stood in groups, drinking, laughing and shouting, they brought into Louvier’s mind the memory of the September

massacres, when that street had flowed with blood. He had been away from Paris at the time, but he had often heard from the lips of eye-witnesses descriptions of that terrible scene. How could he know that it might not be repeated?

The gruff soldiers, towering above the crowd in their cocked hats, pushed their way rapidly through the throng of excitable sightseers. As these caught a view of Louvier, and saw that another deputy had been arrested, a wave of excitement passed through them. A hysterical frenzy seemed to seize them, and with a bacchanalian ecstasy of destruction the whole mob struck up the tumultuous tune of the '*Ça ira*.' It seemed to act on them like the fiercest intoxicant. It was the delirium of chaos—the *abandon* of the rush downhill. As they finished, group after group began to dance the *Car-magnole*—circling round, hand in hand, in mad excitement.

To all this the soldiers paid absolutely no attention. With the butts of their rifles they made a road up to the door of the prison, and there stood at ease as their captain approached the sentinel. He saluted.

'Who goes there?'

'A friend of the Republic. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. A prisoner.'

'Show your warrant.'

The captain laughed roughly.

'*Morbleu!* You've got very particular in these parts of late.'

'Yes, Madame Guillotine has a double edge. *Tonnerres!* If anyone is to be shaved, I would rather it were you than I.'

'It's all right, my friend. Our consignment of goods comes this time from a citizen whose name still has some weight ;' and he showed him an order signed with the dread name of Fouquier Tinville.

The sentinel immediately gave way, and the officer next disappeared into a little side office to register his prisoner.

He came out with a blank face, followed by the gaoler, gesticulating. Close at his heels came two big, fierce-looking dogs, their necks encircled with ugly spikes.

'I am very sorry, Citizen Captain,' he was saying, 'but I haven't room for another mouse. We filled up the last corner in the chapel this morning, and there isn't a square inch.'

Sierre was evidently annoyed.

'A nice business—sending me tramping about Paris like this. It is time you were cleared out again.'

'That's what I say—and here are plenty of citizens perfectly willing to do it. But what will you have? Our Sainte Guillotine claims the monopoly!'

'Then it's time she hurried up.'

'Yes, the good lady is slow. But,' he added, cunningly, 'I expect we shall have some room by to-night.'

'That's too late—my orders are to house my prisoner immediately. Where can I go?'

'Oh! La Force was cleared this morning. There was a big batch taken.'

'It is a long way.'

The gaoler shrugged.

'It's your only chance.'

Very sulkily, Sierre re-formed his troop, and marched back through the turbulent crowd, across the Seine, far down the quay, until, after a few rapid turns through side streets, they reached the 'Hôtel de la Force.'

Here there was little difficulty. The clearance of the morning had made the *concierge* only too eager to secure some new guests.

There was a great hubbub of creaking hinges and jingling keys, a great deal of arguing and pushing and chattering, and in a few minutes Louvier found himself on the wrong side of a great door, in a large, badly-lighted hall, lined with mattresses.

'Your bed is in that corner,' said the gaoler, kindly; 'it is fairly clean, but it's only straw.'

'I sha'n't want it for long,' laughed back Louvier.

'I dare say—I dare say,' sighed the gaoler, who was a gentle creature, but rather morose, and fol-

lowed about by a very dirty pet lamb. As he turned to go, the gaoler suddenly recollected something. 'Supper at nine — three francs,' he said, laconically.

It was some time before Louvier's eyes grew accustomed to the dim light of the great, long, high-roofed chamber. But he gradually realised that the room was by no means full. A few prisoners were sitting about reading or writing, and several women sewing. Others were lying down, snatching some sleep.

He soon found the cause of this in an open door at the other end of the room, through which men and women passed freely to and fro. Curiosity led him through it, and he found himself in a large courtyard, crowded with people of every rank and fortune. The prisoners were enjoying their last hours of freedom before being locked up for the night. Most of them were in full view of the public, and a small crowd had gathered by the railings of the courtyard, watching them closely.

It was a strange and varied scene. In one corner were a group of women, mostly seated on benches or chairs, some children playing about among them. Many of them were reading or teaching their children, others were mending clothes, while several were engaged in active flirtations. A number of young men were standing by or leaning over their chairs. In another

corner was a circle of older men engaged in a heated argument. As Louvier passed them he could hear the names of 'Quesnay,' 'Voltaire' and 'Rousseau' recurring frequently. They were probably members of the first Assembly—the ardent Liberals who started the Revolution. Further on was a knot of peasants and labourers. Some of them were smoking or playing cards, but most seemed overcome by the situation. These were sitting in silent gloom—one or two rising now and again and walking to and fro like caged animals. Accustomed to physical labour, there were probably none who suffered more from the loss of their liberty.

All these people had fallen into certain classes from obvious and inevitable divisions of interest. Now and again one would pass from one circle to another with natural ease, and it was obvious that there existed between them a sort of *camaraderie*, or spirit of mutual helpfulness.

But this was not so with one circle which seemed separated from the rest by barriers that could be felt. It was not only that the other prisoners left them, by a sort of general consent, a separate part of the yard—the part further removed from the railings and the outer world. In every respect they seemed to be creatures from another world. While the rest of the prisoners were dressed for the most part in the simpler dress of the hour, many of these

were still wearing the silks and satins, silver buckles, wigs and three-cornered hats of past years, while several of the women still powdered their hair and painted their faces as well as they could. And these outward insignia of the old life were accompanied by a sort of survival of the old manners—the bowings, the elaborate courtesies, the self-conscious attitudes. For the simple explanation was that all these men and women belonged to the nobility of the Old Order.

To Louvier's astonished eyes these people seemed like a resurrection from the dead. The spectacle recalled to him in a flash the whole system of life and manners against which he had rebelled, almost forgotten, in the swift changes of the last five years. So there it was, unchanged and unrepentant! How quickly it might again revive!

Fascinated in spite of himself, he had drawn near to them, and was leaning against the prison wall.

Close to him was sitting a small knot of nobles round an elderly, rather *roué*-looking old man, who was playing with a gold snuff-box. His coat was very shabby, but it was of satin and of a faded blue.

A younger man was speaking.

'*Mon Dieu*, a fine-looking man, M. le Duc,' he was saying; 'he came to the prison this morning—a marquis with three quarterings. He would add greatly to the elegance of our circle.'

The old Duke laughed and took a pinch of snuff.

‘You young men have no principle. I always said that the age of principle came to an end with Louis XV.’

‘Oh, M. le Duc!’ protested the younger man.

‘It is true, my dear Baron; since then all you’ve looked for is a good leg. And this is what you have brought us to!’

He looked round with a dolorous air. He had been in that prison for four years. Once he had owned one of the best châteaux in France.

‘The important question to ask is,’ he went on, putting the snuff-box back in the pocket of his shabby coat, ‘what is the fellow’s record?’

‘A very good record—with the exception of one slip. He voted against the Game Laws on August 4th.’

‘A fatal slip—quite unforgiveable.’

The Duke took out his snuff-box again, and clinched the judgment by taking a tremendous pinch.

The younger man looked crestfallen. He relapsed into silence and turned away. It was obvious that this exclusive society rather bored him, and yet he was not strong enough to break away from it.

And then his eye fell on Louvier and brightened.

The cleanliness and tidiness of the new-comer’s costume made him a conspicuous object in the

shabby crowd, and his appearance had already excited a good deal of whispering comment. But the different groups held back rather shyly from approaching him.

Things had got terribly mixed. One had to move with circumspection. How could anyone tell whether Louvier was Royalist or Republican, Christian or Atheist, Jacobin or Girondin? All were equally liable to imprisonment.

But the Baron was *ennuyé*, and eager for the chance of a new companion.

He leant down and whispered a word in the Duke's ear. The old man looked round towards Louvier, scanned him critically and nodded assent.

A few moments after, Louvier was awakened from a reverie by a voice at his elbow. Turning, he was faced with the rather absurd Don Quixotish figure of the young nobleman, his silk coat torn in several places, and his wig sadly in want of powder.

The young men bowed with a stately courtesy, which, in such surroundings, almost set Louvier laughing.

He began with a sort of melancholy gaiety.

'I am the Master of Ceremonies in the Grand Salon de la Force, now the only centre of fashion and breeding in this benighted city. Before I introduce you to my friends, may I have the pleasure of knowing your name, degree and style?'

Louvier bowed in turn, not without a touch of irony.

‘Bertrand Louvier—citizen of the French Republic.’

‘*Ci-devant*? Excuse me, but here we still attach some importance to these little distinctions.’

‘*Ci-devant* rather less than he is now. A *bourgeois* of the town of Arras, whom his country has honoured by electing Deputy of the Convention.’

The Baron gave another bow, this time quite formal.

‘In that case,’ he said, icily, ‘we regret to have to leave you to your *friends*.’

The emphasis did not escape Louvier.

‘It is indeed a bitterness,’ he said, very suavely, ‘to be excluded from such *polite* society.’

His visitor turned hastily and walked back to the group, where his report was received with much head-shaking.

‘Another of those *cochons* got his deserts,’ Louvier could hear one of them say.

The little knots of Republicans had watched the encounter closely.

Finding that the Royalist ambassador went away in disgust, they began to approach Louvier with confidence. When they found that he was a Deputy from the Convention there was a burst of interest. He was overwhelmed with questions as to the outer world. Why had he been arrested?

Was Robespierre still supreme? Was there any chance of release, of rescue, of mercy? What was the latest development?

To few of these questions could Louvier give any definite reply, and on many he preferred to be silent. But he accepted the proffered comradeship, and when at nine o'clock their melancholy gaoler called them in to a meagre supper, he gladly took his seat on the long, hard bench in the dimly-lighted hall by the side of those who shared his sufferings.

CHAPTER VIII

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

ROBESPIERRE'S habits regulated all the doings of the Duplay household, and it was due to his wish that the family did not take their evening meal until seven o'clock. This enabled him to have a long afternoon, and to go well refreshed to the Committee of Public Safety at eight. Elise, therefore, in perfect serenity of mind, and quite unconscious of any trouble, was still sitting in her favourite room at six o'clock, work-basket in hand, intent on beguiling the tedious hour before the evening meal.

Her father had returned from his work at the Tribunal, and was reading his paper on the settle by the open window. Her mother had finished her duties for the day, and was gently napping in a comfortable chair at the far side of the room. Young Simon had returned from his errand, and

was hard at work upstairs writing letters for Robespierre. His younger brother, an eager, though youthful, Revolutionist of fourteen years, was relaxing the intensity of his high political enthusiasm, deep in the charming pages of *Paul et Virginie*—seated on a high-backed chair at the table.

It was a tranquil family group, and anyone who had strolled in there from the atmosphere of some country whose annals are dull would have concluded that these people lived in the midst of security and well-ordered peace, and that the father of the household was a prosperous merchant in a busy industrial centre.

Citizen Maurice Duplay, indeed, had every reason to consider himself a fortunate man. He had given a home and refuge to Robespierre and his younger brother Augustin, at a very critical moment—when the elder brother was under the dark shadow of complicity in the September massacres—and now found that his hospitality had brought him a blaze of reflected glory as the landlord and entertainer of the most powerful man in France. He had been ahead of his time; now he was abreast of it. His house had become a conspicuous and social centre for a certain group of Jacobins; his son, Simon, had become Robespierre's secretary; and he had every prospect of making good matches for each of his three daugh-

ters, one of whom, indeed, was already married to a young Deputy. But though he was fortunate, his occupations were somewhat out of the way of conventional business. In the old days he had been an extensive householder, but his rents had almost disappeared in the general laxity of payment that prevailed during the Revolution. For this loss he always regarded himself as a martyr, but had taken consolation in the fees he received as a juror on the Revolutionary Tribunal, a post he had gained by the help of Robespierre's influence.

And yet, to all seeming, Citizen Duplay was a well-satisfied, well-groomed, middle-aged *bourgeois* of a type by no means extraordinary, with greyish hair, pale blue eyes, and smiling mouth, clean shaven and open-faced, bland with dulness, and shining with respectability. At the present moment he was calmly perusing his paper with all the dutifulness of a good citizen—spectacles on nose, and gravity in his eye.

After reading silently for some time, he laid down the paper with a sigh.

'Ah,' he said, 'should I have ever believed it if I had been told five years ago that humanity was so full of evil? Here we have been working, not without zeal, for two long years at the great task of extirpating rascals, and there seems to be as many left as ever,' and he sighed again deeply.

‘Yes, rascals,’ he repeated, as if someone had contradicted him. ‘This afternoon we had ten of them, men and women who are criminals of the deepest dye, intriguing against a State which wishes them nothing but good, plotting and planning the destruction of the virtuous.’ As he went on, the good man threw down his paper, and glanced around as if he had been placed on his defence. ‘I say that the highest mercy with such people is to have no mercy. As I said to my friend, Citizen Paris, this afternoon, if we did not kill them, they would butcher us. Ah, it is an evil world!’ and the fresh sigh with which he ended this little harangue awoke Madame Duplay from one of the pleasantest little naps, as she afterwards remarked, that she had enjoyed that week.

The poor woman looked troubled. She could not imagine why the world would persist in vexing such a good man as her husband. Why would not men give up their private prejudices and be good?

‘Why don’t you speak to Citizen Robespierre about it all?’ she murmured, somewhat vaguely.

This was another of the good woman’s standing remedies for all evil—to speak to Citizen Robespierre. It was a remedy with which her husband was not in complete sympathy. Citizen Duplay had a fancy for figuring as a public man of independent

position. He was accustomed to speak grandly of 'My lodger, Robespierre,' and 'The time when Robespierre and I went into public life together,' or 'The havoc which my public duties have caused in my private affairs.' He always felt a slight feeling of irritation when his wife, with that curious faculty of a stupid woman for hitting by instinct on the truth, emphasised the facts in a casual phrase. Why should he speak to Robespierre? It was much more important for Robespierre to speak to him.

Good Citizen Duplay therefore felt a little bit annoyed, and showed it by burying himself once more in his paper. His wife was vaguely conscious of having said the wrong thing, and dropped asleep once more.

Elise took no part in such discussions. She was still outside the Revolutionary whirlpool. Woman-like, she had hitherto taken her politics from her father and lover, and was content to believe that all Royalists were criminals, and that no fate could be too bad for them. Living in the centre of Paris, she could not remain ignorant of the storm; she had heard the thunder of the cannon in the attack on the Tuileries, and had seen the wounded come back from the Bastille. But up to this moment she never questioned that all was well, and echoed all the enthusiasms of her household with a firm belief that her own side was entirely in the right,

She had felt the stir of the Revolution, but not, as yet, its terror.

At the present moment her thoughts were not running at all in a political direction. Her maiden heart was still a-tremble, half in joy and half in doubt, with the promise that she had given that afternoon. Would her father consent? Would the match gain the approval of the great, good Citizen Robespierre?

Many a girl at that moment would have cared little for such things as a father's approval, for women, too, were touched with the general 'movement,' and there was no human tie that had not been shaken in the overturn. But this was not so with Robespierre's circle, or with the Duplays, and if anything they were more respectable and virtuous than ever. The thought of a runaway match had not yet entered into the girl's head.

Besides, why should anyone disapprove? Was she not going to marry the bravest, best and handsomest young Deputy in the Convention? How fine and soldier-like he had grown!

But these reflections were interrupted in a totally unworthy manner.

There was only one person in the house who suspected the true condition of affairs, and that was the little Revolutionary rascal who was now seated by the table, and whose interest in Saint Pierre's

Paul et Virginie was varied by sundry smirks and grimaces which his sister did not at first understand. At last his chance came. The mother was sound asleep again, and the father had left the room to fetch another paper. Young Duplay leant across the table and grinned provokingly at his sister.

'I say, Elise, it's no use trying to hide it. I know what he said this afternoon. I shall tell them, if you don't mind.'

His sister blushed and looked vexed.

'*Tais-toi*—hush, you naughty boy. Leave your sister alone. What have my affairs to do with you?'

This was an evasion of the point, as the boy well knew.

'Fancy your not seeing me! .Why, you silly, I was behind the curtain the whole time.'

Elise flushed in spite of herself.

'You're a very rude boy. I shall box your ears if you do that again.'

'Come on,' he said, 'I am ready for you.' But time was short, and not to be spent in these frivolities. 'Look here, Elie, let's be quits. If you don't tell about me, I won't tell of you. There's a regiment going to the war to-morrow, and I want to go with them. Why shouldn't I go? I'm fourteen,' said the young Revolutionary, drawing himself up. 'Anyhow, I'm going. If you give me some money and

don't tell father till the evening I won't say a word about *you*.'

'You know you mustn't go there. There are lots of horrid people there who will kill you or hurt you. Father said so. He said that the war there was dreadful, and the poor soldiers had to fight against barbarians. You mustn't go. You ought to be at school.'

The little rascal laughed.

'Why, you know it's shut up. Old Mercier is in prison, and all the other masters had to cut and run because they wouldn't teach us the new Constitution. And serve them right!'

Elise sighed. The revolutionary child was perhaps a little trying.

'Still, you mustn't fight yet. Wait till you're older.'

He sniffed contemptuously.

'Well, I'm going. Do as you like. If you tell father I shall tell him about you.'

At this moment their father entered the room again, and the conversation dropped. The young schemer was once more deep in Saint Pierre, for all the world as if innocent reading was the only thing he cared for in the world.

It was now wearing towards half-past six, and the sun had left the narrow street on which the room looked out. Elise moved nearer to the window to get the best of the light, and bent over

her work. She was already somewhat agitated at the premature discovery of her secret ; and it was quite impossible to tell whether the youngster would not be as good as his word.

But this was only the beginning of trouble. Looking up from her work for one moment, she saw Ninette standing at the door in the dim light and beckoning to her. With a vague sense of coming catastrophe she rose and went to the door.

‘Ninette,’ she said, ‘what is it?’

‘A letter for you, mademoiselle—from *him*. It was passed under the door and left there without a knock. I have only just found it. It is in his handwriting. But it is so small, and the writing is so hurried, that I am afraid it may be something—something important.’

‘Give it to me,’ said Elise, with a chill at her heart. ‘Let me read it.’

She took the note, opened it quickly, and read it. She stood as one stunned.

‘Arrested?’ ‘Taken to the Abbaye?’ ‘Forget me and be happy?’ What could it all mean? Why should Louvier be arrested and taken to the Abbaye? They only did that to criminals—to men who had done something wrong—to the men of whom the good M. Robespierre spoke so strongly and severely in the *salon* in the evening. That was all well. If men would be wicked they must be punished. But Louvier, the best, the noblest, the

most gifted! Arrested? Her head turned at the thought.

It must be a blunder. As soon as they found out he would be released. It was only a matter of days. Why did he take the matter so seriously? She had before now heard of people being sent to prison by mistake. But their friends had only to speak to the gaolers and they were let out.

Forget? Forget *him*?

Then suddenly, as she stood there, all the dim rumours that had been brought to her ears of the tragic sides of the Revolution, of the people who had gone to the wars and never returned, of the people who had gone into prison and never come out, of the people who had been killed by wicked men—the wicked men who were now being punished—all these tales, hitherto to her but the mere trifles of conversation, swept back into her recollection. And as this vague anticipation of woe swept through her mind the poor girl broke out into bitter weeping, and allowed Ninette to lead her away to her room.

In the silence of her chamber, courage came back to her. Her lover was in prison, but she was free. It was for her to play the man. She wiped away her tears and began to think deeply. Whither should she turn for help? How could she, a helpless girl, break down the prison walls?

Ah! There was just one chance.

She sat down and wrote a short note.

'Could I see you for one short half-hour? I want you to help me.'

She called Ninette.

'Give this to Citizen Robespierre as soon as he comes in.'

Half an hour afterwards she received an answer. Robespierre would see her to-morrow at twelve o'clock.

CHAPTER IX

A DREAM

THE scanty supper of soup and herbs, for which the mild but wily *conciergerie* in the Hôtel de la Force extracted his three francs, had been served and eaten, and the prisoners scattered from the austere deal tables, where they ate in alphabetical relays, to their evening occupations. It was not yet ten o'clock, and there was still more than an hour before the lights had to be extinguished.

Louvier was tired out, and anxious to sleep. Making his apologies, he retired from the company, and lay down on his bed of straw.

It was in vain. From every part of the hall rose the hubbub of voices, the crackle of laughter, and the clink of money.

At last, after many minutes of restless tossing, he raised himself on his arm and looked round. Little groups of prisoners were scattered about, en-

gaged in games of every description—some acting a charade, others playing *bouts rimés*, others absorbed in chess, backgammon, or draughts, or cards. Most of these games were being played for money. The prisoners seemed possessed with a sort of hungry greed for living. With anxious parsimony they hoarded the last few hours of life.

The scene was weird, ghostly, mysterious. Flitting to and fro in that great dimly-lighted space, the prisoners looked like disembodied spirits, and it was almost possible for Louvier to imagine himself already across the dark river.

He gave up all thought of sleep, and, rising, strolled about, chatting with various prisoners. His attention was drawn by the shouts of laughter that came from a little crowd of prisoners in one of the corners.

He joined the group. In the centre were sitting a dozen men in long robes—he afterwards found that they were the coverlets taken from the beds. In the centre of the row was one on a slightly larger chair than the rest, speaking slowly, in a tone of mock authority. In front sat a solitary prisoner simulating an expression of utter fear. Behind was an erection of chairs, across which had been laid a plank from one of the beds. At the end was a basket, and suspended above it another board. It was a clever imitation of the guillotine,

and the man in the larger chair was the mock President of the mock Revolutionary Tribunal.

‘Prisoner,’ he was saying, ‘you have been proved to be innocent. It has been shown that you are a man of exemplary life. There is evidence that you possess all the virtues.’

‘Shameful monopoly!’ shouted one of the jurors.

‘Yes,’ went on the judge, ‘you have been a pious son, a dutiful brother and—worst of all!—a good husband.’

‘Cruel selfishness!’ interrupted another.

‘Prisoner, this is a terrible record,’ said the judge, solemnly.

‘Horrible,’ echoed the jury.

‘Nothing that I can say can add to the heinousness of your guilt. In the course of a long life you have neither murdered, nor robbed, nor lied nor—’

‘Nor prevaricated,’ put in a juror.

‘Nor prevaricated. Therefore, prisoner, I sentence you to death, and may Mademoiselle, the Goddess of Reason, have mercy on your soul!’

The jurors nodded simultaneously, and a little man, adorned with mock horns and a tail of sorry paper, rushed from the audience, seized the condemned man, and, dragging him along, threw him down on to the sham guillotine.

And the prison resounded with shrieks of laughter.

Further on, as Louvier walked round the great hall, he came across a small party of four sitting round a bright little dinner-table, flushed with wine. They had evidently dined well and freely. Louvier's appetite had been far from satisfied by his meagre supper, and there was perhaps a touch of envy in his voice when he asked a bystander whence these luxuries came.

'Oh!' said the prisoner, 'the gaoler has heard that they are to be in the "paper" either this evening or to-morrow. He told them, and so they got him to give them a last meal. They've spent their last sous on it.'

'Quand ils m'auront guillotiné
Je n'aurai plus besoin de nez,'

carolled one of the diners.

'Nor of a mouth,' put in another; and they laughed.

'Oh, yes! we are in luck,' cried a third; 'it is not every day that one draws a prize in the lottery of the Sainte Guillotine.'

'It is comforting to think how cheaply we shall live after to-morrow.'

The first speaker suddenly rose from his chair flushed. He raised his glass and shouted,—

'This is probably our last meal!' he cried.

‘Yes! yes!’ echoed another, blasphemously—
‘Our Last Supper.’

‘Well, then,’ he cried, ‘we will not die like curs.’

‘No! No!’

‘I have a toast.’

‘Give it!’

‘It is—“Death to Robespierre!”’

For a moment Louvier saw one of them—he was very young—look round with a blanched face. The bystanders fell back, and several passed hurriedly on. But the next moment the young fellow had recovered himself, and joined the rest in their ecstasy of defiance. They stood on their chairs lifting their glasses high over their heads, and yelled, ‘Death to Robespierre;’ until the prison rang again.

Not far away, a little man stood watching them. He was a spy.

Louvier turned away, sick at heart. Fresh from the healthy outer world, and unadapted to the morbid frenzies of this gloomy abode—himself overcome with the horror of a great separation—he could not play the disinterested observer. He did not know which element in this prison life filled him with more repulsion—its gaiety or its gloom. Throwing himself on to his couch, he fell into a train of melancholy thought.

Had Elise got his letter? If she had, what would she do? A dread passed through him lest she might try to communicate with him, and get into trouble, as so many other women before her in these times. Ah! it would have been better for him not to have written!

‘Citizen!’

The tones were so melancholy that Louvier started from his reverie as if he had been addressed from the tomb. He turned to find himself fixed by a pair of melancholy eyes, that seemed to burn from under a great nest of matted hair.

It was the occupant of the nearest bed that had spoken, and he had raised himself to a sitting posture.

‘Citizen,’ he repeated, ‘you are new—are you not?’

‘Yes; I came in to-day.’

‘Do you come from the Vendée?’

‘No; from Paris.’

The speaker turned away as if in disappointment.

‘He would not know,’ he muttered to himself. ‘Ah! they never come from there!’

The prisoner was very reticent, but, by a few sympathetic questions, Louvier managed to draw from him his story.

He was a Breton, a citizen of Nantes, who had

been dragged up to Paris after the defeat of the Vendéans at Le Mans. His wife and two children had been guillotined. But he still had one left—a son—and he had lost sight of him. His only hold in life was the desire to trace this son. Of every prisoner he asked two questions. Did they come from the Vendée? Had they seen his son?

Louvier knew little of the proceedings in the Vendée; he had been far off, and posts were few and slow. He seized the opportunity of hearing a witness at first hand. Shocked at the tale, he pressed him with questions.

The poor fellow wailed out his woes in a kind of monologue. 'The brutes,' he cried, '*les sauvages! les barbares!* My wife and children—yes, they guillotined them all to the sound of the 'Marseillaise.' They were going to shoot me when orders came from Paris that enough had been done. Yes,' he muttered, 'enough, because they knew that one so bereaved and widowed could be left to die by slow agony, because they wearied of the swift and merciful death, and preferred the slow.'

And he relapsed into morbid silence, gradually verging on the madness of monomania, waiting eagerly night after night to hear his name in the lists, but never achieving his desire.

Louvier lay back on his couch and fell into a mood of deep despondency. What tale more

agonising could be told by the stones of the Bastille itself? What choice, he reflected, between a corrupt despotism and a savage populace? Was there anything to equal this in the records of the *lettres de cachet*? As his prophetic imagination leapt forward, he seemed to see filing before him a long century of alternate licence and slavery, ending—he saw not how. Was this, then, the value of all his brave hopes and dreams?

His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a loud grating of doors and jingling of keys, and he became aware of a mad rush from every side of the hall—a fevered, eager crowding, in the centre of which a ruffianly creature, with a large hat and ostrich feather, an immense sabre stuck in a tricolour sash, and a general air of bravado, was reading rapidly from a long list by the light of a torch.

It was the List—the ‘Roll-Call’—a sensation before which everything paled. All on that list must take their sad farewell—the carts waited outside to take them to the Conciergerie. They would be tried on the morrow, and from the Court they would go to the guillotine. Acquittals were now so rare that they were scarcely thought of.

Things were going fast—it was the second visit to that prison in one day.

For the moment, all the mock gaiety of that

reckless crowd disappeared. In the presence of inevitable woe, wives clung to their husbands, children to their parents and girls to their lovers, as name after name was read out, and one after another of those present was touched with the blast of terror that came forth from the Committee at the Tuileries.

Very different were the fashions in which the sentence of doom was heard. Called from the table, the banqueters made their exit with a fine bravado. They once more drank 'Death to Robespierre!' embraced their comrades with gaiety and, amid triumphant huzzas, marched jauntily away. On the other side of the room the air was rent with the shrieks of a young girl, who had to be dragged from her mother by the goalers, wildly protesting her innocence, and crying for mercy.

Louvier had fully expected to find his own name in the list, for little delay was allowed between an arrest such as his and an execution. But he was too weary to feel much relief. What did it matter whether it came to-day or to-morrow?

Completely exhausted, he threw himself down on his mattress to sleep. But it was very long before there was quiet in the room. Many of the prisoners, their minds seared with fear and excitement, had long abandoned the hope

of natural sleep, and tried to drown their troubles throughout the twenty-four hours in the absorption of the gambler's passion. The chink of money passing from hand to hand and the clink of glasses seemed to continue without ceasing throughout the livelong night. And when in the very early morning—in those dead hours between two and four—these sounds almost stopped, their place was taken by the restless tossings of some fevered sleeper, or the low weeping of some bereaved mother or wife.

But at last the grey dawn crept reluctantly, and as if she had been a forbidden guest, through the windows of the great hall; and then, as often happens after a night of wakefulness, Louvier fell into a deep sleep.

His swift thoughts, released from the bondage of the will, bore him far from Paris. He was sitting in a little cottage by the banks of a great lake, far from France. He seemed to be surrounded by comfort and a sense of friendship, and yet he had an inevitable feeling that he was not at home—that the home belonged to someone else. Opposite him sat a young woman whose face was indistinct, and on her knee was a babe, while playing on the floor were several other children, all with their faces hidden as in a heavy mist. He strove hard to see them more clearly, and in the agony of his eagerness he

seized one and tried to look her in the face. But at his touch she vanished, and he was left clasping the thin air. And then he looked and saw at the other end of the room another figure, seemingly that of a man, also quite blurred and dark to him. And suddenly the air was filled with a wailing clamour, as of an unutterable woe. The house and all that was in it disappeared, and he awoke.

CHAPTER X

A FATEFUL PROMISE

PRECISELY at twelve o'clock on the following day, Robespierre entered the sitting-room of the Duplays, dressed in his neatest costume, with a coat of delicate blue satin over an embroidered waistcoat, close-fitting silk knee-breeches, silver-buckled shoes, and delicately-powdered hair.

Elise was already there, leaning wearily back in a large stiff-backed chair, very pale, with dark rings under her eyes, eloquent of her long night's vigil. Perhaps grief had added to her appearance a touch of interest even more powerful than the piquant beauty of her youth, for Robespierre certainly felt a beating of the heart, such as the Convention could not cause; but he showed no sign of emotion. He sat down rather sternly and primly, and began, in a style not unlike a priest addressing a penitent,—

‘Come, my dear,’ he said, ‘tell me what it is you want with me. My time is short. What you take

is lost to France ;' and, with studied composure, he set himself to listen to her tale.

Elise began nervously but simply.

'Ah, Monsieur Robespierre'—the girl had never quite caught the trick of 'Citizen'—'I come to you because you are so good, and because I am in trouble. My mother always tells me that you are so much better than any of us, and that if I am ever in any great trouble I ought to come to you.'

Robespierre winced, but the girl did not notice it as she went on, and in brief, piteous sentences told him the story of her love and her loss. She little knew what it all meant to him, with what bitterness he now realised the utter futility of his own suit and the dulness of his own perceptions. He hated her deference ; it only told him more clearly how far removed he was from her love.

Grief gave the girl a new power of language, and, as she ended her story, her appeal would have touched a harder heart.

'Ah, citizen, you are powerful ; you can do everything you want to do. Do not repulse me. I know that you have only to say the word. Oh, tell me that you will ! Think what it is to be torn away from one you dearly love, to know nothing of his fate, not to know even why he is punished, but simply to stand and look into the dark night whither he is gone, never to come back again !' and the girl buried her face in her hands.

Robespierre tapped restlessly on the floor with his buckled shoe. As his eye fell on the young girl, there was an unmistakable softening in its glance. Naturally sentimental, he felt a sympathetic tear growing beneath his eyelid, and dashed it impatiently aside as it welled out on his cheek. He must keep calm or all would be lost.

‘Young woman,’ he said, slowly, ‘do not weep; your tears distress me.’ And then, after a pause, he went on,—‘What you ask is much—very much. You ask me to interfere with the justice of the sovereign people.’

‘Justice?’ she exclaimed, with a chill at the heart.

‘Yes, justice,’ he said, frigidly. ‘Louvier has been arrested by the people, and by the people he must be tried.’

‘But he has only just returned; he is innocent.’

‘He may be innocent in your eyes, but if he has sinned against the Republic, he is guilty.’

Elise gave a little gasp of fear. The harshness of Robespierre’s utterance came upon her with a terrible surprise. She leant forward and clutched the arms of her chair.

‘It is false!’ she cried; ‘it is false! He is innocent—innocent as the day.’

‘Hush, hush!’ said Robespierre; ‘hush, my dear; you do not understand these things. How can you know whether he is innocent in this? He

may be a saint in everything else, but if he sympathises with our enemies, he is a criminal.'

This was the first time that the girl had been brought close to the stern, merciless logic of the Revolution. It appalled her. She sank back into her seat and moaned aloud.

'Then there is one thing at least which you can grant me. You can let me die instead.'

'That is impossible,' he replied. 'It would not be just for the innocent to die for the guilty.'

'What, then, can I do?' she cried; 'what can I do? Is there no way of release?'

Robespierre had been watching his opportunity with a forcible restraint for the last few minutes. Now was the appointed time. As she asked this question, he shot a quick glance at her, and replied quietly and almost reflectively,—

'Yes, there is one way of release, but only one.'

Elise had again buried her face in her hands, but when he uttered these words she dropped them and looked up with a new eagerness.

'Oh, tell me,' she cried, 'tell me, what is it? I will do anything that is required of me.'

He leant forward towards her with a keen, calculating look in his eye. He spoke very quietly.

'Is there nothing you will not do?' he said.

'Nothing,' she said.

'Think again before you say that,' he said.

'What I ask you may be very hard.'

‘How can there be anything?’ she cried.

There was a silence between them for a moment. Then Robespierre spoke again. .

‘Elise,’ he said, very calmly and almost frigidly, ‘I love you.’

There was a long silence, broken only by the girl’s quickened breathing—the silence of an appalling revelation on the side of Elise, and on Robespierre’s side, of a close and watchful cunning, mixed with suspense.

So this was the ‘true truth,’ *la vraie vérité*, underlying all the mystery of Louvier’s arrest and imprisonment. She had come for help to the source of all her woe; the man whom she had figured as counsellor and friend was really the cause of her catastrophe. The whole situation flashed on her, a young girl, as a new revelation of evil—a new realisation of the nature of things. In a few short moments she seemed to live through years of experience. This terrible, unwelcome love—the love of the iceberg for the spring—filled her with horror. She shrank away from Robespierre.

As for him, he misread her silence. He saw that she understood the nature of his offer. Perhaps she was overcome by it. Ignorant of the girl’s nature—far removed from all human simplicity—he could have no clue to the struggle going on in her mind. She was young—there

could be no harm in making the matter clearer to her.

‘Only say the word,’ he murmured, dropping his voice to a low tone, ‘and he shall be free, and I—happy.’

She shrank away once more, with a loathing now unmistakable.

‘Release my betrothed,’ she said, ‘and then I will listen to you. Not until you show mercy will I believe that you can love.’

He started as if he had been cut with a whip, and drew back his half-proffered hand. This proud reception of his love filled him with deep resentment. A rush of jealous anger took the place of his amorous fervour, and he rose to his feet with set lips and pale, livid, face.

‘Very well,’ he said, ‘then the law shall take its course. I disdain to bargain. Out of a feeling of sincere affection I offered to abate the rigour of Republican justice. I was wrong, and you were right. That justice is from God, and should be interfered with by no mortal man.’

‘No,’ he went on, turning on her a keen, watchful gaze as he traced the effect of his words, ‘his name shall be in this evening’s list; he shall be taken to-morrow before the Tribunal, and before daybreak he will take the long journey to the Carrousel.’

His words infected her with a blind terror, catch-

ing at her heart like some physical ailment. For the moment all idea of gaining her end by manœuvring gave way before the image of immediate danger and death summoned up before her in Robespierre's words.

'What do you mean?' she cried. 'What do you mean? Do you mean that he will die?'

'Yes,' said Robespierre, as he prepared to leave the room, 'I mean that he shall *die*.'

At this, all her reserve fled. As she saw Robespierre about to go, with the sentence of doom on his lips, she rose from her seat, and following him, threw herself at his feet, clinging wildly to his knees.

'Ah, M. Robespierre, they say that you are good, and you say that you love me. You cannot kill him because I refuse to do what is impossible! Ask me anything else and I will do it. Tell me that I shall be parted from him for ever and I will prefer that, rather than he should die.'

Agonised by his silence, her voice descended to a sob.

'What use will his death be to you? If you kill him you will kill me, for if he dies I cannot live. Have pity, citizen, have pity.'

He stopped, thinking deeply. She was right. Louvier's death, though easily procurable by the evidence in his hands, would be of little use to him.

Besides, her kneeling figure affected him strangely. He bent down and touched her hands to unclasp them. She shrank away from him.

‘*Ma chérie*,’ he murmured—and how that phrase stung her!—‘smile on me and tell me that you will be mine, and again I say he shall be free to-night.’

‘I cannot, I cannot. It is impossible. I love *him*!’

Robespierre shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

‘Well, then,’ he said, ‘the Republic must have its revenge.’

He turned to go, but still hesitated. If he left things thus, he stood to lose. He would gain nothing by the death of Louvier except this girl’s undying hatred; and he had sufficient imagination to perceive in her, undeveloped as she was, the possibilities of a Jeanne d’Arc. Besides, he loved her; and as he looked at her now, beautiful in her sorrow and abandonment, the desire of possession swept over him with an overmastering power.

By every principle of justice that he recognised, Louvier ought to die. If he were released, he would become a dangerous, impalpable foe. But what did it matter if he could win *her*?

Had he done his best? Might he not compromise?

Elise had gone back to her chair, sitting in utter,

tearless despair. He went up to her softly, and spoke in low, measured tones.

‘I have done you the honour of offering you my hand. You have refused it. Good. I might bear resentment, but I flatter myself that I am above that.’

He paused and gave a virtuous sigh.

She made no sign. He went on.

‘I will go further. I will humiliate myself to the dust. I will ask you once more—do you give me no hope?’

Again he paused, and when he resumed, spoke slowly, uttering word by word.

‘If, for instance, I released the citizen to-day, would you give me a promise for some distant future time?’

He turned away and left his words to work.

They threw Elise into a turmoil of doubt, hope and fear. So many things might happen to make such a promise void! There were so many chances! How could she refuse? How could she prefer her own happiness to her lover’s life? Surely kind heaven would be pitiful!

Her face was set hard in thought.

‘To-day—shall he be released to-day?’ she asked, eagerly.

‘Yes, to-day. I give you the word of Robespierre,’ he said, proudly.

‘And this—this promise—’ she spoke the words

with a sort of loathing—‘it is for the future—for a long time?’

‘All I want of you is to give me hope.’

‘To be fulfilled—when?’ she pressed.

‘When we have peace, when the work of punishment is over, when the enemies of the Republic are scattered, and when I can rest from my labours.’

He looked at her keenly. She seemed to be softening. He added gently,—

‘And then you and I can leave all this turmoil, and dwell far away in some quiet little home, on the sweet bosom of calm Nature, who is just and free and good.’

The sentimentalism was lost on her. She was simply trying to reduce his generalities to terms of time.

‘But that will not be soon?’

He sighed.

‘The times are dark, and it may be many years hence.’

It was a strange dialectic between the direct, prosaic questions of the girl and the sentimental diplomacies of the man.

But now there could be no doubt—she was to be allowed a reprieve. Never was there a greater temptation.

For the moment she almost forgot the darker side of the picture—the grief and anger of her

released lover, the long bondage of her reluctant engagement, with the ever threatening future of an abhorred wedlock. She only knew that, unless she gave this promise, Louvier would be executed to-morrow. She only saw that the only alternative to a compulsory betrothal was a compulsory widowhood. She only felt that the cost of her own freedom would be her lover's death.

Perhaps, if she had been trained in the strictest school of the Stoics, she would have preferred to join her betrothed in death, rather than to drag him back to a foiled life. But she was a young, inexperienced girl, played upon by an astute and practised diplomatist.

It is hardly to be wondered at that Robespierre's last move—specious and plausible as it was—should have overcome her resistance. She scarcely, perhaps, fully understood the impossibility of serving two masters, or the absolute gulf which she thereby fixed between herself and Louvier, as, torn between her love and her desire to save him from a shameful death, she whispered the fateful words,—

'If that be so, I promise.'

CHAPTER XI

RELEASED

ELEVEN o'clock was booming from the great clock in the prison of La Force on that evening—the second of his imprisonment—when Louvier turned away wearily from the jostling, eager, anxious crowd gathered round the crier at the door, and made his way back to his mattress of straw.

His name was still absent from the list. What could it mean—this delay?

He threw himself down, and sat gloomily meditating. The first buoyancy had passed, and the prison gloom had fallen on him.

A few moments later his attention was drawn by a commotion in the crowd at the door. Men turned and looked round, and he was surprised to see them looking in the direction of his bed. They began pointing excitedly towards him. At last one walked rapidly in his direction.

'Citizen Deputy Louvier, I believe?' he said, as he came up.

'Yes, I am he.'

'You are wanted. Our visitor has a message for you.'

So it had come at last! He felt a dull vexation that the silly fellow should have passed over his name. But it was just as well that it should come.

He walked across to the crier with his kindly messenger.

'I am ready,' he said, shortly.

'Faith! I don't want you,' said the man. 'The committee think you too good for me.'

'What do you mean!'

'I mean that I have an order for your release.'

Louvier almost gasped with the suddenness of the change, and then laughed.

'You have kept your good news for the last.'

'Yes; my hand is rather out at such jobs, citizen. I nearly mixed yours up with the rest.'

'And am I free now?'

'Now, unless you prefer the pleasant society of this comfortable and inexpensive abode.'

Ten minutes later Louvier left the prison, amid the generous joy of his fellows, and with his pockets full of letters and messages to friends and relatives outside. It was a long walk to his rooms in the Rue St Honoré, and when he reached them he was wearied out.

Sleep came to him in brief snatches—the deep,

dreamless sleep of exhaustion. But now and again he would wake with a sort of trouble in the blood, and lie wondering over the mystery of the last two days. Why had he been arrested? Why was he released? Who was this dark, unseen enemy that first struck and then withheld his hand?

At last he awoke to find the sunlight streaming into his room. He was wide awake. It was vain to woo sleep any longer. His mind recurred to an old habit of his earlier days—a morning walk in the gardens of the Tuileries. He would go there now—and think.

There is something subtly exhilarating in an early walk through a great centre of population. It is a pause in the whirl of life—you alone seem to move. You feel on your cheeks the fresh and fragrant breeze of dawn blowing through streets that will be soon close and unwholesome with the breath of thousands—a deceitful harbinger of the dusty day to come. At such a moment the memories of human failings and follies that haunt great cities seem to be wiped out, and the future to spread in front like a blank sheet of paper as yet untouched by human pen. Your eyes are undimmed by the toils and disappointments of the day, and look bravely out on life. The strength born of sleep is still in your limbs, and the chords of feeling make sweet

music, struck by the first rays of the morning sun. The weight of habit seems lighter, and the world lies before you, inviting to heroic tasks.

It was with some such physical exhilaration that Louvier walked up the Rue St Honoré, and past the Duplay's house—still, in all seeming, closed and wrapped in slumber.

CHAPTER XII

A DISCOVERY

SHORTLY after four o'clock that morning, after a restless, anxious night, Elise had risen, wrapped herself in a dressing-gown, and taken her seat by her bedroom window, looking out over the Rue St Honoré. She watched the day break over the great city, and the great, round sun shoot up suddenly from an immense bank of clouds. To her sick fancy they seemed red with the blood of the unjustly slain.

She was tired out with two sleepless nights, and the change of posture was not sought in vain. Short snatches of slumber, vexed with dreams more troubled than her waking thoughts, passed over her, but never for long. Each time she woke with a start, and at last, shortly after five o'clock, chilled with the early morning air, she rose and dressed herself, and once more resumed her place at the window.

Since the previous afternoon events had moved rapidly.

Robespierre had soon made it clear that he took her promise in no platonic sense—that he would exact the full measure of his contract.

He had gone straight to her father, and, in a few formal words, asked his assent to their betrothal.

The good man was delighted. In his ecstasy he embraced Robespierre, and swore eternal fidelity.

‘My dear friend,’ he cried, ‘it is the topmost moment of my life!’

And then Robespierre had asked for two small favours. One was that the betrothal might be made public, and the other was that ‘during that trying period’ other suitors might be excluded from the house. Duplay had consented to everything.

He had called in his daughter, told her his plans, and blessed her. ‘Honoured among women,’ he cried, ‘enter on thy proud career!’

She had made no protest, and gone away in silence. What could she do or say?

She heard the great clock in the tower of Notre Dame boom out the hour of six, and slightly shifted her position. Sunk in painful reverie, her eyes were resting idly and with little activity of vision on the street below. Her imagination was figuring

to herself the great cavernous prison where, as far as she knew, her lover was then immured, and the solitary gloom of that deep despair which was reflected in the one little note that had been conveyed to her. Then her thoughts flitted back to the long vista of years which she would have to spend, betrothed and perhaps in the end married, to a man whom she detested.

'Oh, I cannot bear it,' she cried, as she felt the intolerable pressure of this double grief, 'I cannot bear it! I would rather die!'

As she said this, her eye fell on the pavement beneath, and she stopped short with the tremor of a terrible thought. How far below it seemed! How easy it would be to open that window, and then—with one little spring—

She drew her eyes away from the fascination of the great height, every instinct of youth standing appalled. But, in spite of herself, her eyes crept again to the pavement a few moments after, and the thought of that possible alternative began to return with increasing force.

It is impossible to say how this would have ended, or whether the madness of suicide might not have overcome even the strength of contrary instinct, but she was attracted by the sight of a youthful figure walking across the line of her vision down the Rue St Honoré towards the Tuileries.

As she gazed she rose half-unconsciously from her chair and pressed her cheek against the window. Her lustreless eye gradually glowed, and her pale cheek freshened with a new joy.

'Yes,' she muttered to herself, her breath catching in the excitement of it, 'yes, it is he. There can be no doubt of it. It is his walk, his face, himself—Bertrand!'

Her sacrifice, then, had not been in vain, and whatever price she had paid she had a reward! She felt almost faint with the relief.

But then she began to reflect. He was passing away from her vision—into silence! She was forbidden to see him. In two hours, then, they would both enter upon a new divided life, parted by an impassable gulf. He would awake from the joy of freedom to find himself abandoned, perhaps to imagine that he was the victim of a plot hatched by herself.

A resolve flashed upon her.

No! She would not leave the days and weeks to build up a barrier of misunderstanding between them! She would not trust so delicate a matter to the chances of indirect hearsay and possibly intercepted correspondence! She would see him now—in these two hours before the household was awakened. Misfortune seemed to give her a new power of action.

Fortunately she was already dressed, and a few

seconds saw her cloaked and hatted. Very swiftly she crept down the passage to the door of the room where Ninette slept, and whispered to her servant some hurried instructions. She was to be in the hall shortly before eight o'clock, and was to open to three finger-taps. Once away from the house, Elise hurried down the street at a pace which almost amounted to a run. Louvier, of course, was by this time out of sight; but she knew his favourite walk and had no doubt as to the course which she should take. Turning the corner that brought her in sight of the gates of the Tuileries, she saw him slowly entering the gardens.

Elise stopped for breath. Now that she was so near, she was almost alarmed at her own audacity.

She arrived close behind him without being seen. In spite of the strain which she was enduring, there was perhaps a slight touch of coquetry in the tap which she gave him on the shoulder. As for him, the sight of her fairly carried him off his feet. With inarticulate exclamations of delight, he seized her by the hands, and with a hungry impetuosity he tried to snatch an embrace.

She drew back.

'No,' she cried, 'it is impossible.' And then, as she saw the look of amazement that came over his face, 'I am sorry; but things are not the same.'

Her words and tone chilled him to the heart with a vague fear. He dropped her hands.

‘What do you mean?’ he said, harshly. ‘Are you, too, unfaithful like all the rest of the world?’

‘All I have done,’ she said, very sadly, ‘is to save your life!’

‘What then? Have you saved me only to spurn me?’

‘Ah, *mon cher*,’ she cried, ‘I could not save you without paying a price. I could not save you without the price of myself.’

She was almost frightened at the effect of her words upon him. An awful fear grew in his eyes.

‘Do not play with me,’ he cried. ‘Tell me the whole truth! Tell me all!’

This was too much. In spite of all her brave resolves, she broke down.

The sight of her grief cured him of his anger, and removed his worst fears. Very gently and tenderly, he led her to a seat, and they sat down in a recess slightly removed from the central promenade, which was now beginning to fill with the first early morning instalments of loungers and Revolutionary hangers-on.

The first sign of weakness in the woman did something to restore a balance to their relations, and called out from the man the necessary strength to bear the shocks destined for him. Gradually he drew from her the main features of the story—all, in fact, except the name of the man who had wronged him.

'Ah, my love,' he said, 'my lost love—you must bear with me, you must forgive my anger in the extremity of this bitterness. You meant for the best in saving me, but did you not know that death would be sweeter than the loss of you?'

'I could not see you die, when I was told that I might save you.'

'We should have met in the Great Hereafter.'

A philosophical hypothesis is but a thin and unsubstantial satisfaction for the passions of youth, and in this case there was this additional defect—that the girl was no philosopher. Elise shuddered at the chill sound of this abstraction, and shook her head.

'All I knew was that I should have lost you in the Great Darkness.'

Louvier rose from his seat.

'Then you have failed of your purpose, my poor love.'

She turned pale.

'What do you mean?' she cried.

'I mean,' he said, calmly, 'that I cannot live without you. I have been baulked of the guillotine, but there are other anodynes for this earthly misery. There is the Seine.'

Distraught with anguish, Elise forgot her reserve. She seized his arm.

'No!' she cried, 'not that! Not that! As you love me—not that!'

'It is just because I love you that I find it inevitable,' he said, with the same calmness.

He gently released himself, and while he did so imprinted a kiss on her hand.

She made no protest. She became very calm and collected.

'Come, then,' she said, 'let us go together.'

He paled in his turn, and looked at her curiously.

'That is impossible.'

'Why?'

'Because—because it is impossible. I can die alone—but what right have I to take you with me?'

'And yet you would inflict on me the agony of your death. If you cannot take me with you, are you right to leave me alone?'

Louvier hesitated.

'I will stay if you will give me something to live for,' he said at last, very slowly.

'There is much to live for. There is hope. My promise is for the distant future—after the Revolution.'

'Nay, I want something more. Leave all this, and fly with me. We shall be followed, but we may escape.'

'Nay, I cannot,' she cried, wringing her hands.

He was asking too much of her. Tied to her home by a hundred memories and traditions—trained to obey by years of habit—she was not

yet ready for such a venture, He saw this, and changed his tack.

‘Then give me the only other reason for living!’

‘What is that?’

‘His name—the name of the man who first imprisoned and then exacted this price for my release. Tell me that, and I will live.’

He uttered these words with a terrible emphasis.

The girl hesitated. She was absorbed by a fear lest, if he came once more into conflict with the power of Robespierre, he should come to dreadful harm.

‘If I told you, you could do nothing.’

His eyes flashed.

‘Am I so weak?’

‘No, he is so strong.’

‘Ariadne did not fear that for her Theseus when she gave him the clue.’

It was the classical style of the day.

‘Perhaps Ariadne did not love as I do.’

‘Is true love so anxious for its object? Did not the lovers of old wish one another to be heroes?’

Her haunting fear was that Louvier would commit some mad act—might attempt to fight or even slay Robespierre, and die like Charlotte Corday.

‘Your love will drive you on. You will—’

‘Am I a midnight assassin?’

‘But you will be tempted—tempted, perhaps, to strike, if not to kill.’

The revelation of the true inwardness of the Revolution had filled the poor girl’s mind with morbid fear. She seemed to be moving, a weak, timid creature, in the midst of violent thoughts and actions. Life seemed to loom on her terrible and gigantic, full of monstrous dangers.

Louvier guessed at something of this. He had been wont to regard her as completely out of the sphere of his political life, and now he looked at her sadly.

‘My poor love,’ he said, ‘what should you know of such things?’

She shuddered.

‘Have I not full cause to know? Promise not to revenge me—to wait—to be patient.’

‘Patient? Am I not human?’

It was destined that the promise should never be given. While they were speaking, Elise had looked at her watch, and now she gave an exclamation of horror. It was a quarter to eight!

‘What shall I do?’ she cried. ‘I shall be late—I shall be missed—all will be discovered.’

And with the panic strong upon her, she rose and began to walk rapidly towards the gate of the great gardens.

With a strong effort of self-control, Louvier ran in front of her to the gate, hailed a *cabriolet*, and

in a few minutes stood at the window while she sat inside, overcome with nervous tension and pale as a sheet of paper.

‘Tell him to drive on.’

His face was set firm.

‘I shall tell him where to go when you have told me the name of this villain.’

‘But, Bertrand—the time—’

‘I am sorry, my love — but not one moment earlier.’

She could evade it no longer. He must know the worst, and she must leave them to battle it out between them—for better or for worse.

‘He is the strongest man in France.’

‘What—?’

‘Yes—my father’s lodger.’

‘Citizen Robespierre?’

‘Citizen Robespierre.’

Louvier said not a word, but turned silently to the driver.

‘To Citizen Duplay’s—as fast as you can go.’

‘Yes, citizen.’

CHAPTER XIII

AN ORDEAL

THOUGH helped by two stout horses, Elise did not reach her home much more swiftly than Louvier reached his—driven by the storm-wind of his own thoughts.

His mind was one turmoil of self-reproach. He cursed the folly of blindness which had kept him ignorant of this rival at his very doors. To be robbed before his very face, staring like a fool, with lack-lustre eyes, on the pilferer who ran away with his bride! To have mistaken a lover for a patron, and to have been misled by that ancient delusion of Platonic affection!

Looking back now on the past, he remembered how often he and Elise had smiled over the lodger's fatherly presents and attentions; how they had laughed at the infinite boredom of those long evenings when Robespierre had read to the

family parts of Racine and Corneille; how they had seen nothing but a love-starved pedant where time now revealed an unscrupulous rival! If Cupid is blind, then indeed he had caught the infirmity.

For two hours he paced his room, thinking deeply. Probably it was now too late either to help or to save; for how could one powerless and unknown Deputy struggle alone against the one who seemed very near to the possession of supreme power? Probably it was too late. And yet—what else could he do? Every other avenue was closed to him. He was shut off from her company. The dice were loaded. It only remained for him to fight Robespierre on his own ground—in the political arena. Only in such a conflict could he find the activity necessary to lull the pain of existence. Yes, that was the only way. He must take his conflict into the Convention, into the Jacobin Club, into the street. There, perhaps, he might secure his revenge.

His general disgust at the turn of things came to strengthen his resolve. He would fight Robespierre, and, in fighting him, he would fight the guillotine. Robespierre's very bargain would give him a presumption of immunity. Far up above him he seemed to see Robespierre poised — high, indeed, but with the nice, delicate

balance of some tumbler whose security a child might destroy. The venture shaped itself to his powers.

He looked at his watch. It was close on ten o'clock, the hour of the morning meeting of the Convention. It was a whole year since he had been there, but the habit returned on him. He would meet Robespierre there — he *must* go! He stopped in his walk, and solemnly raised his hand.

'I go to meet him, to fight, to pursue, to dog him until the close, and that close shall not be until either I perish or he!'

He dropped his hand, and very quietly and calmly took up his hat and cane. In a few moments he was striding once more down the street towards the Tuileries, past the house of the Duplays. For how many months this was destined to be his morning walk!

It was little after eight o'clock when Elise, flushed with the morning air and the excitement of her venture, stepped into the great breakfast-room. Never did she look more beautiful and piquant.

She almost fell back with the surprise of what she saw. The great windows were wide open, and the warm spring sunlight poured in on a gay and variegated scene. It was the very season

of fraternity, and the people passing down the street did not hesitate to stand and look in. Across the road a party might be seen breakfasting in the open street, gaily exchanging repartees with passers-by. The great table was richly decorated with flowers—red, white and blue—and round it sat a large family party.

It was the feast of her betrothal, and all were in the brightest of clothes and spirits. At the head of the table sat Duplay and his wife, brimming over with importance and happiness. They had that ominous air which haunts people who are about to make speeches, or inflict some ceremonial on a suffering world. To their right and left sat the members of the two families—Charlotte Robespierre and her brother Augustin, a simple and devoted youth, with no thought except for Maximilien; Simon Duplay, as gaily dressed as any *muscadin*, and his two sisters, with his brother-in-law Lebas, a rather solemn-faced young Deputy. The family party was completed—somewhat to Elise's relief—by the fourteen-year-old Revolutionary, who was already consoling himself by an ample breakfast for the sudden destruction of his plans, and a compulsory life of civic ease. What could be done with a sister who had so many lovers?

At the bottom of the table were two vacant chairs.

As soon as the company caught sight of Elise, they all rose from their seats, and enthusiastically welcomed her. Augustin hurried towards the door, and, offering her his arm, escorted her, blushing and confused, to one of the chairs. The young fellow was so pleased that he could scarcely contain himself.

‘A brother’s privilege,’ he cried, and, kneeling, kissed her hand.

The whole company were delighted. Her confusion was accepted as a maiden’s embarrassment.

A few minutes afterwards, Robespierre entered himself—his cravat of unimpeachable snow, and his peruke freshly powdered. He knew the value of scenes, and perhaps it was not altogether by chance he came in late. It was certainly not without premeditation that he advanced to the side of Elise, and, stooping down, kissed her on the left cheek. The company was so transported at the sight that they did not notice the start of horror with which Elise shrank away from him or the low gasp, more eloquent than words, in which she spoke her disgust.

But these signs were not lost on Robespierre. His was not an eye that saw far into a maiden’s heart, and he had hoped to find his captive more amenable—more inclined to submission. On second thoughts, perhaps, she would have realised the

greatness of his gift. Her womanly ambition would have been aroused. But this reception thrust him back on the grim reality, and for the moment he felt the pang of a bitter disappointment. A sour look came over his thin features, and he responded with little warmth to the congratulations of those around him.

He had not won her—he had only bought her with a price. She would never let him forget that. The very reality of his passion—the one live thing that had crept into his distorted life—drove away the self-illusion that drugged his political existence. He could not be content with a half victory. He must really possess her, soul and body! And it maddened him to think that, in his momentary victory, he had only built a firmer barrier.

The clatter of the meal, and the gay laughter and talk of the guests, all in the highest of spirits, left Robespierre to pursue his reflections undisturbed. Augustin was amusing the company with the latest stories from the Convention, and for a time the silence of the two at the foot of the table was not noticed.

He was describing the end of a debate.

‘Those *cochons* of the Plain hoped to beat us on that; but the women in the galleries would not have it. They jumped the barriers, and when these *messieurs* wanted to rise and vote they held them down in their seats.’

‘Bravo! Well done, Mountain!’ cried several, and they all laughed.

‘That’s the way to do it,’ said Simon Duplay. ‘The Republic can dispense with forms.’

‘Yes,’ babbled on Augustin, obviously proud of what he was telling; ‘and the other day, when one of them rose to speak, a fellow in the gallery hit him in the mouth with a plum, and he had to stop in the middle of a sentence.’

They all laughed again.

‘A good vegetarian diet,’ said Simon. ‘Citizen Pigott would have approved.’

‘What does he say?’

‘Haven’t you heard? He says that the early Romans fed on cabbages — that bread is indigestible—and that the committee ought to make us all live on vegetables.’

‘Especially the prisoners,’ said one, with a wry face.

‘He says we ought to extend Republican principles to the animals, and have no right to force them to polygamy.’

A laugh went round at this, but less hearty than before; and some of the company listened seriously, as if they were half struck with the notion. For it was a time of unlimited hospitality to new ideas.

But now the frugal breakfast was almost finished, for though it was a gay occasion, Citizen Duplay

had observed the Spartan simplicity of the prevailing habits. He had prepared, however, an innocent little surprise for the end of the meal. Just as the company were about to rise a servant entered, bearing a tray containing several bottles of choicest Tokay and glasses. A laugh of pleasure ran round the table.

But Citizen Duplay's little scheme fell in very ill with the mood of Robespierre — depressed and annoyed at his failure, and reminded at every moment, by the averted face and downcast eyes of Elise, that such rejoicing was but mockery. When the wine came round to him he made no effort to conceal his distaste.

'*Merci*,' he said, shortly. 'It is not my habit to drink wine at this early hour.'

The rebuke was patent. It startled the gay company, and all eyes were turned towards Robespierre and his *fiancée*. There was a quick perception of something wrong—not difficult to read in the face of either. For the moment an awkward silence fell on all, and when the flow of talk set in once more it was with a feebler stream, not seldom broken by side-long glances towards the silent couple.

'A lover's quarrel,' whispered Simon to his second sister.

'Early in the day,' she laughed.

But Duplay was not to be turned aside from the

speech which he had long threatened. In fact, his natural dulness had grown to blindness with the absorption of preparation. He had not noticed the little drama at the other end of the table. He was wholly unconscious of any hitch when he rose, glass in hand, to propose the toast of the betrothed.

The company were almost glad of an excuse for silence, and Citizen Duplay found a passive audience for his glowing periods. Every Frenchman is something of the orator, and it would have gone hard if Duplay had not picked up some experience at the Tribunal. In fact, he was rather proud of his powers in this line, and he did not spare his audience a general discourse on the Republic and the Virtues. This preamble over, he came to Robespierre.

‘Simple in all things, our friend has shown his simplicity in this also. For though he could have wedded among the mightiest, he has chosen his bride from among the poor and the simple.’

Compared with his lost rents, Duplay had perhaps some justification in regarding as poverty the eighteen francs a day he received as a juror. But there was a ring of cant—and, like many adepts, Robespierre could tolerate cant in no one but himself. He moved restlessly in his chair and drummed on the table with his fingers.

Seeing this, Duplay turned to his daughter—a subject of which he was more sure.

‘But you, my daughter, how can you, who are so young, realise the greatness of your fortune? Perhaps it is as well that you cannot, or your happiness would be too great—’

But Elise heard no more. The silly flood of platitude, the great booming voice, all those staring eyes and glaring flowers, the garish sunshine itself, and all the gaudy mockery of joy and delight, all seemed to dazzle and deafen her. The room swam round her, and she fell into a kind of stupor. The voice stopped, there was a pushing away of chairs as the company rose, a cry of ‘To the *fiancés*,’ a draining of glasses, shouts of ‘Bravo!’ a jingling of glasses and stamping on the floor, but all was blurred and dim, and she seemed far away, as if present at another’s dream.

Robespierre saw the deathly pallor deepening on her face, and he felt a sudden fit of impatience at the stupidity going on around him. This was not the way to win her! It was vulgar, brutal, *banal*!

But they were crying for a speech.

He rose to his feet. There was a hush to hear him. ‘*Je vous remercie*,’ he murmured, with an inclination of the head, and, abruptly turning on his heel, left the room.

Through the whole company there ran a chill—as of coming misfortune. Madame Duplay found herself involuntarily crossing herself. Her husband sighed. Robespierre was sometimes, it must be confessed, rather a trying man. And just when it was going so nicely !

‘ Ah,’ said Duplay, turning up his eyes, ‘ see our leader ; the State calls, and he goes. These little cases cannot delay the pilgrim long.’

Augustin moved to follow his brother, and, with a common impulse, the company rose and drifted past where Elise was sitting, silent and pale, the cynosure of eyes.

When she next looked round she was alone.

CHAPTER XIV

THE EXILES

IN a little London coffee-house, in the centre of Fleet Street, two French emigrants—a nobleman and a priest—were sitting enjoying their coffee at four o'clock in the afternoon of April 14th, 1794. At this moment foreign exiles were so frequent and familiar a sight in the streets of London that Englishmen paid little attention to them. The haughtiest of the French nobility had been driven to live in the purlieus of Leicester Square, and were earning a scanty livelihood by teaching French, dancing, music, or any other accomplishment with which they could boast the remotest acquaintance. The fairest of high-born Frenchwomen were earning their bread with a toil no less dreary and monotonous than that of the commonest London seamstress.

The little party of Englishmen, therefore, who

were taking their meal at the other end of the room, left the Frenchmen entirely to themselves, careful not to disturb even with intruding glance. They were left to converse freely, in a privacy as absolute as that of their own homes, and rendered still more easy by the high wooden partitions into which the room was divided.

The elder of the two still wore the costume of a French priest—an Abbé. The younger man was of a different and more worldly type, and his dress bore traces of a certain faded grandeur that spoke of better days.

The elder was the Abbé Lemaître. The younger was the Marquis de Saens.

At this moment the Marquis, moved out of his usual taciturnity, was talking rapidly and eagerly.

‘No, father,’ he was saying, ‘I do not defend the stupidities and follies of my own order. I will take no part in the silly intrigues of Milan and Coblenz. They bore me. These fragments of a broken world can never come together again. I was so disgusted by their behaviour at first that I threw myself into the Revolution with ardour.’

‘What was it that checked your ardour?’ said Lemaître.

‘Why, my faculty for exhausting illusions. There is no man who finds it more difficult to

deceive himself than I. I get through more illusions in a year than most men do in ten. And now the Revolution bores me as much as the Old Order.'

'You must have been unfortunate. True enthusiasts do not generally see the seamy side.'

'Ah, but that is just where Providence always fails me. I was born with an incurable trick of seeing things as they really are. Fortune herself is against me. She always throws me into contact with her grim realities. I remember with what enthusiasm I greeted the downfall of the Bastille, how I took my place in the crowd and shrieked with enthusiasm as the procession passed with the prisoners freed and the keys of the Bastille on a pole. I still recall that contagious enthusiasm—that insane joy! So great was our delight, that men, utterly strangers to one another before in the world, rushed into one another's arms and embraced, that women held up their children to be kissed by the heroic victors, and crowned them with laurels as if they had been gods.'

'And then what happened?'

'Why, as I still stood in the street, overcome with pleasurable emotions, I saw another procession sweeping down towards me. I pressed forward once more with joy! It must be another group of splendid victors! But how shall I ever forget the terrible shudder that seemed to run through

the crowd as the procession came nearer, and the horror that overcame me as I saw that in the centre were no released prisoners, but the gory heads cut from the bodies of the defenders of the Bastille! I fell back dismayed. My illusion fled. I had dreamt that freedom meant happiness and goodness, but here once more the beast in man obtruded itself to my gaze, and the old waves of doubt came over me.'

'Did you immediately emigrate?' said the Abbé.

'No, I did not immediately emigrate. I began to reflect that perhaps this savage element in the New Order might be subdued, and a nobler element come to the surface. But again my ill fortune pursued me. One evening I was looking out from an upper window of my *hôtel* in Paris, when a howling crowd swept down the street. I was sitting at the window with my sisters and my mother enjoying the view. Imagine their horror when these wretches lifted upward for our gaze the bloody heads of Foulon and Berthier, whom they had just massacred in their carriages as they came into Paris. I knew Berthier well.'

'And then did you leave Paris immediately?' said the other, in a low voice.

'No, I still waited. I still hoped that the good men would have the courage to punish these mis-

creants, and to develop the good side of the Revolution. Nothing was done. A few speeches were made, but Berthier was left unavenged. The fact that I condemned his murder made me a marked man. I found myself in danger of perishing stupidly and causelessly, just mangled to death with a playful stroke of the paw of the great Revolutionary animal. At that, I confess, I determined to go. I left a France insane. I will go back to her when she has recovered her sanity.'

The Abbé shifted in his seat. A shadow passed over his sensitive face.

'No,' he said, slowly, 'I cannot agree. France, you say, is insane. Well, and is that the time to be away from her? No, no, it is all the more need why we who are still sane should go back and lend our voice!'

There was a silence, and then Lemaître resumed, answering De Saens's unspoken question.

'I came away against my better will. I was over-persuaded. But I am weary of this exile. I shall return. Better be murdered in France than play the coward in London.'

The Marquis laughed lightly.

'I was not born to play the hero.' I suppose that is one of the illusions through which I have worked. And why,' he went on, turning eagerly to the priest, 'why should *you* go back to feed their hungry maws when there is a New World

inviting us, where freedom really goes hand in hand with restraint? Come with me next week to the far West. I am weary of this Old World, with its impotent strife and its repeated failures. I go to seek a newer clime. Come with me.'

'No,' replied the priest, 'my roots in the Old World are too deep for that. I cannot drag them up. I sorrow for my people—at all hazards, I must go back to my people.'

The Marquis did not at that moment try to press the point. He knew, of course, that any priest who set foot in France at that moment was liable to immediate arrest and execution, and he regarded the design of Abbé Lemaître as nothing less than madness. But he also knew the obstinacy of the old man, and he despaired of shaking him at present.

They paid their score, and left the little shop, with its quaint partitions and its fussy, benevolent old waiters, to pass out into the main thoroughfare of Fleet Street.

CHAPTER XV

EDMUND BURKE

IT was now nearly five o'clock, and Fleet Street was full of fashionable loungers, politicians, merchants and others taking the air. The unceasing procession of sedan chairs and footmen filled up the greater part of the thoroughfare, and made walking at times somewhat precarious. From the shops came the cries of the apprentices with their incessant 'Buy, buy.' Every now and then a carriage would be driven down the centre of the muddy road at a pace that betokened little regard for the passers-by, and throwing up splashings of mud which sometimes fell on the spotless coats of the golden youth.

As our friends passed down the street they received frequent greetings from the comrades of their exile—now so numerous that they had become a sort of world within a world in the life of London, bound together by the intimacy of common misfortune.

First they were saluted by two young French Countesses, dressed in the shabbiest of black dresses, and carrying their work to the tailor who employed them, at the end of their day's toil. They carried it across their arms, in the manner of the Whitechapel seamstress of to-day, and there were dark lines under their eyes, but they greeted our friends with gaiety. Nothing could quench their spirits.

A little further on they came across a young French noble, very much out at elbows, returning from giving a French lesson to the sons of an English sympathiser. He was an old friend of De Saens, and stayed a moment for a laughing chat.

The next passer-by was of a different type—a tall, haughty man, still dressed in the perfection of the old style—a vision of silks and satins. He greeted them distantly and coldly, as belonging to a lower order. He alone of all these was doing nothing for his living, but lived, like the French royalties themselves, on scrapings from foreign exchequers.

Lemaître's brow darkened.

'It is men like that,' he said, sadly, 'that make me think sometimes that the Revolution is in the right.'

'Of course it is in the right, my dear father,' replied De Saens, with a laugh. 'Otherwise it

would not *be*. It is only we who are crushed by it that cry out.'

Lemaître frowned. De Saens's cynicism jarred on him.

A little further on they met a man of a very different quality from any of these, not a Frenchman or an exile, or even a nobleman, but one who, though a simple member of the English middle-class, had done more to hamper and oppose the Revolution than any other living man.

They met him in the Strand—an elderly man of distinguished carriage, now somewhat bowed with age, but still marked in face and bearing by a certain unmistakable greatness. He lent heavily on his stick, and the clouds of a disappointed life seemed to be gathering on that broad brow of his. But the eyes still flashed genius; the firm set mouth still bespoke an immovable will; and the strong look of command still betrayed the ruler of men. But what, after all, struck one most about the face was probably not the symptoms of power, but the dreamy, impassioned look that came over him from time to time—the look of an idealist.

For this was the dreamer and poet of the Old Order—Edmund Burke.

As he made his way down the street many passers-by recognised him, doffed their hats and fell aside to let him pass. Some stood and watched

him, while fathers pointed him out to their children. All viewed him with a sort of awe—a kind of distant hero-worship, as for a man of another mould. It seemed more like the regard that men have for their saints than for their statesmen.

But to all such incense he seemed indifferent passing on with that world-weary air of a man whose purposes have failed, and who is travelling through the last dark lustre of his life with his eyes set on the goal.

Our French friends, like most other exiles, had every reason to think well of Mr Burke. Both knew of many friends helped and saved from destitution by the funds which he had raised, and the Abbé had scarcely arrived in England a few days before he received a pressing invitation to Beconsfield.

As they approached him, they took off their hats with a low bow, and Burke, roused from a gloomy reverie, looked up and recognised them with a happy smile. There was just one thing which now gave him any joy in his gloomy life, and that was to meet a French exile, and through him to combat that spirit whose victories he watched with a brooding eye, touched with a melancholy bordering on mania.

‘Ah,’ he cried, ‘it is you, *Monsieur le Marquis*, and you also, my good priest. This is well met, indeed. How goes it with all our friends?’

'Well, Mr Burke,' replied the Marquis, 'it depends on whom you mean. If you speak of us, we fare as well as men can fare who have been torn from country and from friends, but who have found sympathy and help where they least expected it.'

'Yes, yes ; but your friends in Europe?'

'They are succeeding less than ever in building their wall to keep out the cuckoo. Good Heavens! Mr Burke, but it almost makes me proud of my country to see how even in her madness she is a match for the whole world.'

Burke's brow clouded darkly.

'What you say is true, M. le Marquis,' he replied. 'Never has a great war been conducted so meanly. The nations of Europe are conducting the controversy with the spirit of mean hucksters, willing to let the enemy burn their houses over their heads as long as they can enjoy their dinner for the day. Have I not said again and again that Jacobinism is a spirit, and must be combated as a spirit?'

As Burke went on speaking he grew more and more excited, until at last, regardless of bystanders, he stood in the middle of the pavement with blazing eye and extended hand, speaking with as fiery an energy as if he had been standing on the floor of the House of Commons. A little group gathered to watch him, but he saw nothing.

The Marquis was far too sceptical to have much sympathy with this passionate opposition to any of the great world forces. In his view, Jacobinism was a development of which you could only watch the course, standing helplessly by, powerless to defeat it.

‘Ah, M. Burke,’ he said, ‘we shall never agree on this point. I will tell you why the Old Order is being beaten by the New. It is this—the Old is dead and the New is alive. Infuse your Old Order with some of the passion of this new creed, and then you will be able to fight it.’

‘Have *I* not tried?’

‘Ah! but you are alone. You are the only hero left in the Old Order. The nations stink, and Jacobinism is the miasma that proceeds from their corruption.’

‘Then what would *you* do?’

‘I? I am weary of it. I despair of any good here. I go next week to seek a new belief in a new world across the great Atlantic.’

Burke’s eyes flashed.

‘You are going to America?’

‘Yes,’ said the Marquis, ‘I sail next week.’

‘Good luck go with you! You, who are young, M. le Marquis, could not visit a better clime. For myself, I must stick by the old ship, and sink or swim with her. God has cast me on evil times, on an inverted order; on the darkest days of the

human race. But my post is here, and I must abide by it. With you it is otherwise. You are going to the one country in the world which has achieved a true liberty—the hope of the world.’

Burke had hit upon a favourite theme. This contrast between America and France was the one consolation of his old age. But he suddenly stopped and turned to the priest.

‘But your friend,’ he said. ‘What is M. l’Abbé intending to do? Is he going to America, too?’

‘No,’ replied the priest. ‘I, too, like you, must stick by the ship. I hope to return to France.’

‘You return to France to throw yourself into this vortex of madness, where you will inevitably perish?’

‘Yes, monsieur, it is my duty. I am sorry to have left.’

‘But wait a year, M. l’Abbe; have patience, and we will revenge you and take you back in triumph.’

The old priest shook his head and smiled sadly.

‘It is not by the hands of conquering armies that the shepherds of Christ’s flock must be taken back into the fold. I go back to France to speak to her deluded people with the voice of faith—not to meet weapon with weapon and force by force.’

Burke sighed. That was not the spirit of which he had spoken. He felt the beauty of this sacrifice; but, as a practical man of the world, it was impossible for him to feel much sympathy with it.

This belief in the power of meekness to overcome the world seemed to him mere folly. He looked at the priest pityingly.

‘Well,’ he said, shaking him by the hand, and turning to go, ‘you will always find a home at Beconsfield, if you wish for one. To help such as you is the only pleasure left in the life of an old man, left stranded by the age, and with few friends—except among the unfortunate. But for you,’ he went on, turning to the Marquis, ‘for you I have nothing but envy. I wish you a *bon voyage*, and if you meet Mr Washington, I desire you to give him my most respectful regards.’

‘I shall do so with the greatest pleasure,’ said the Marquis, and with mutual bows they parted.

.

It was now growing late, and the shadows were long when the two friends passed out of Oxford Street to the modest little lodging in Poland Street, where they had united their resources to face the shocks of the world. They made their way up the darkened staircase into the little room at the top of the house, which was their common sitting-room.

A letter was lying on the table, addressed to Père Lemaître. The handwriting clearly betrayed that it came from France, but the name and address were both concealed under a cryptogram, only

known to the agents of the French exiles in Paris and London—between whom, in spite of all the vigilance of the Paris police and Robespierre's spies, constant communication was carried on. The Abbé had in Paris a friend who sent him every week a careful account of all events, and this was his weekly despatch.

While the Marquis went to a chair near the fireplace and sat down somewhat wearily, Father Lemaître opened his letter and scanned it closely, sitting near the window to get the light. He read through the greater part of it without seeming to find anything very remarkable or distressing, though an occasional sigh betrayed the news of some fresh outrage against his religion and his fellow priests. But the close of the letter strangely excited him. He rose from his seat and walked across to where the Marquis was sitting. He put the letter into his hands, and said,—

‘Read this.’

The Marquis took the letter and read as follows:—

‘Deputy Louvier has been arrested to-day in his house in the Rue St Honoré. It is said that he was arrested by the order of Robespierre himself, and in that case there is little chance of his safety. He was taken, I believe, to the Abbaye, and is there lying at this moment. It is said that he helped a

priest to escape. I am the more surprised because he has not taken of late a very active part in politics. But it seems as if nothing could protect a man in these evil times. A good friend of mine, a respectable shopkeeper of strong Republican views, was guillotined a few weeks back for selling a few ounces of sugar above the State fixed prices. With such things as that happening, he would be bold who looked with certainty on life or limb.

‘P.S.—They say that M. Louvier was in love. If so, this makes the case the harder. The gossips hint at rivalry, but our little Robespierre is no more capable of it than an icicle.’

The Marquis read the letter and handed it back with a sigh. It was a horrible catastrophe: but what could be done?

‘A sad end to so excellent a youth,’ he said, ‘to be burnt like a moth in the Revolutionary candle—’

He stopped short, for the passion of grief depicted on the old man’s face drove away speech.

‘It cannot be!’ he cried. ‘He shall not perish.’ He seized the letter and crumpled it up in his hand as he walked up and down in extreme agitation of soul. ‘He shall not perish. He saved me from those wolves, and I will save him! This decides me. I go to Paris to-morrow.’

‘But M. l’Abbé,’ said the Marquis in remonstrance, ‘what can you do there?’

‘I?’ said the priest in bewilderment, as if recalled from a dream. ‘What can I do? I? I know not—but *I can at least die!*’

CHAPTER XVI

THE JACOBINS

IMAGINE, if you can, a vast semi-circle of wooden seats rising to the very roof of a long Gothic building that had been a church, the nave completely boarded in, and the nature of the building entirely hidden, except in a high pyramid of black marble that had defied the architects, and rose above the wood against one of the walls. Opposite these benches rose a high platform, and in the middle a sort of elevated pulpit reached by circular steps. The tricolour flag waved over the pulpit and a bust of Marat, adorned with crape, frowned on the world below. Above—high up against the broken stained - glass windows—ran wooden galleries, whence favoured visitors could listen to the speeches and look on the scene below.

Such was the Assembly Hall of the famous Jacobin Club, in the Rue St Honoré.

In the front row of one of the galleries, on a hot afternoon in early June 1794, sat Elise Duplay—the honoured guest and betrothed of Maximilien Robespierre, the Jacobin of Jacobins. The atmosphere up in that gallery seemed peculiarly close and noisome. It was not the sort of place that a girl like Elise would have chosen of her own accord.

She had been brought by Robespierre. The visit was part of a scheme pursued unweariedly for the last three months—a steady and persistent siege—the siege of her heart. Whether in street ovations, Convention victories, or Jacobin applause, Robespierre had never omitted a single chance of showing her his more imposing and benevolent side, ever hoping to heal her wound and gain her forgiveness by the brilliant attraction of his power and the fascination of a great position.

To-day he was to make a great speech. He had brought her to see and hear. Refusal had been impossible. Always watched and ever spied upon by her family, frowned on by her dissatisfied father, acquiescence had been the only policy. She had played her part with a sort of melancholy endurance, avoiding all recurring storms by a general maxim of resignation, stoically followed from day to day.

Since April she had been closely guarded—

almost like a prisoner. Robespierre, informed of her interview in the Tuileries Gardens, had dropped hints to Duplay, which were not lost. Simon Duplay, angry at his sister's coldness to his master, had acted the part of watch-dog. Not a word or a message had passed between her and Louvier. She had never seen him except at a distance—in the Convention, or in the streets. Could it be wondered at that she had become a prey to melancholy, that her rounded cheeks had lost their outline, and the dark eyes grown pathetic with their solitary and unspoken woe?

But her sorrow had, if anything, added to her beauty, and many eyes were directed to the spot where sat the betrothed of Maximilien Robespierre. The company in the gallery was mixed, and she had found herself seated between a spruce young officer of the Convention Guard, gay in cross-belt and tricolour sash, and a vigorous market-woman, noisy and large. The officer busied himself with little acts of gallantry not unrefreshing to a woman in so stormy a scene—clearing a space for her, fetching refreshments and keeping order among the people round. But the market-woman evinced a supreme disdain for these amenities, and followed the scene below with a running fire of comment, familiar and patronising.

‘Ah!’ she kept saying, ‘this thing is going fast

There's a lot of lovely heads gone since I was here last, and that's only three weeks ago. You see that corner, that's where our Père Duchesne used to sit. He's gone now. For our god-father Robespierre is very particular, and the good *père* would not wash himself. But see! there comes the young saint, St Just, and his little dog, Citizen Couthon. Robespierre will be here soon now—he's never far behind them.'

'Hush, hush, my good woman,' broke in the officer; 'you're wearying the good lady. She doesn't care about your prattle.'

'Nonsense,' said the applewoman, sharply, for she was no respecter of persons. 'You think the young lady wants you to make love to her. She's above all that. She's a good Revolutionary, aren't you, my dear?'

But Elise scarcely listened; there was enough in the scene below to absorb the attention of any unwonted visitor.

The sitting had not yet begun, and an excited and impatient crowd were jostling and tumbling into the benches, with a perpetual uproar and hubbub. The seats were quite insufficient, and dozens found a precarious tenure on the broken fragments of saints and bishops in the corners. Noisy discussions were already going on in several parts of the building, conducted with oaths and ribaldry. Red-capped newsboys passed in and out, shouting

their papers in shrill-voiced discordance ; oranges were peeled, and plums tossed about ; bottles of wine and brandy were handed from mouth to mouth ; and great clouds of tobacco smoke already rose.

From the top of the building came the forlorn hooting of owls. The poor things had been regularly fed in the old days by the leisurely occupants of the monastery, and would now express their hunger in such melancholy utterances for hours together—often in midst of the speeches. There was a laugh, and a hush as a young man seized a rifle and aimed at one of the birds. The report resounded with a terrific noise, and the poor thing fell wounded and palpitating into the middle of the turbulent crowd.

There followed a sudden silence, due to the arrival of the president and secretaries. They entered by a door behind the platform, and took their seats. The president sounded his bell, and the sitting began.

The proceedings opened with a general airing of grievances and new proposals, wild accusations against classes and individuals, and vast shadowy resolutions wedding the impossible. Resolution followed resolution in quick succession. There was no criticism, no debate. Everything was swallowed in the eagerness to get on.

'I propose that all children should be educated in music,' cried the first. It was agreed to.

'I propose that the merchants of the Loire, guilty of forestalling, should be arrested,' cried another. . . Agreed.

'I propose that a statue of the people be erected in Paris, as high as what is known as the Cathedral of Strasburg.' Agreed.

And so in this wild phantasmagoria, cruelty interchanged with kindness, and the practicable with the impracticable, chasing one another in mad dance. Over all lay the shadow of madness—the lack of sane proportion—the element of the portentous, the gigantesque, the monstrous.

But at last the resolutions came to a close, and the president again sounded his bell.

'*La parole à Citoyen Robespierre*,' he cried.

There was a hush of expectancy as a door opened behind the platform, and Robespierre appeared—neatly attired in precisest black, and freshly powdered.

The effect was instantaneous. Every man in the hall rose to his feet and shouted himself hoarse, while Robespierre, plainly gratified, slowly mounted the steps of the tribune, took a big manuscript from his pocket, unfolded it, and laid it before him.

But, in spite of the momentary flush of pleasure which mounted to his cheek, Robespierre was look-

ing pale and wearied. A peevish look seemed to dominate his small features, and his voice rang querulous and harsh through the listening hall.

There were few men there who did not know that he had full cause to be anxious. For three months, since the fall of Danton and Hébert, he had reigned almost alone and supreme. Through the Convention, the Jacobins, and the Committees, he had ruled France, and, above all, regulated the guillotine. Blood had flowed in streams. The guillotine had worked at twice its previous pace. But nothing else had been said or done. There was no sign of reform or constructive idea. And now even his friends were beginning to tire. Nay, more, they were beginning to fear.

And so round him there had grown up in those months a network of intrigue—subtle, evasive, secret and unexpected. The Convention was honeycombed with it. The Committees were full of it. And his enemies were combined by strange, unlooked-for ties—moderates with extremists—fanatics with opportunists.

The explanation was simple. These different men were inspired by one common motive—Fear. And the man who, regardless of all political or personal ties, laboured night and day at the work of effecting the combination was—Bertrand Louvier.

All this, in vague, shadowy hints, Robespierer

set forth before his Jacobins to-day—the last faithful audience left to him. No names were mentioned—no parties. The speech was a series of insinuations and complaints—only terrible because of the power behind.

But it ended with a scheme at once ominous and terrifying. In a few terse sentences he sketched the plan of a new law, more terrible than anything yet enacted, which he intended to bring before the Convention. By this law, evidence, counsel and all the forms of justice would be suspended; the Revolutionary Tribunal would be quadrupled; the guillotine would become king.

It was the obsession of a fixed idea—the compulsion of a monomania.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ESCAPE

THE long roar of applause which greeted the close of Robespierre's speech was dying down, when suddenly the market-woman cried: 'There is our little Louvier.'

Elise had heard little of Robespierre's speech. If she had, she would have understood little of its significance, for she was no politician. Intensely wearied with the tumult around her, she had leant back in her seat with eyes closed, seeing and hearing little. But this exclamation effectually roused her. She was instantly wide awake and alert. Following the woman's eyes, she looked below.

There was no mistake about it; Louvier was sitting almost immediately below them, in the middle of a group of young men. All wore big red caps, some of them thrust low over their faces; most were disguised in long coats and loose shirts.

For the moment Louvier had removed his cap, and was looking up to the gallery. Thus it was that as Elise looked down their eyes met. What was it in his look which sent to her heart a sudden chill of alienation and solitude? Why was it that, as she saw the lines of hatred and suspicion on his face, all the freshness and innocence seemed to go from her love, while in its place there arose an image of storm-tossed passion and ugly revenge? The bright hero of her early love seemed to have gone. Would the hero-worship follow?

But she had little time to think. Suddenly, from the part of the hall where Louvier sat, there arose a hubbub of confused cries. In the general din it was still possible to distinguish shouts of '*Vive la Raison!*' '*A bas l'Etre Suprême!*' '*A bas Robespierre!*'

Robespierre looked round sharply and angrily from his seat on the tribune. But the hall was densely packed, and it was only those in the gallery who could see that the noises came from the little body of men round Louvier, who sat for the most part with shut lips and crossed arms, and then, like a well-trained chorus, shouted these cries in unison.

Suddenly, they all rose in a body and began forcing their way through the hall, now openly crying '*A bas Robespierre!*' Each was carrying an innocent-looking walking stick, which he now

wielded vigorously, striking to right and to left. No one waited for a second blow, for they were loaded with lead in the handle.

The sticks struck terror, and the crowd gave way rapidly, leaving a wide avenue to the door. Before the Jacobins as a whole could recover breath, the young men had disappeared.

It was all so quickly done that it was very difficult for the people at the other end of the hall to realise what was happening, and the confused uproar and craning of heads gradually ceased as a diversion was created by a new speaker. Those near the door were at first inclined to follow the young men; but a recollection of the loaded sticks restrained them. Those who escaped being hit soon began to laugh heartily over the sore heads of their disconsolate comrades, and the episode finally passed off in a roar of merriment. Such incidents were not uncommon.

Not so with Elise. When she had first seen Louvier rise, thrust his red cap over his head and begin to make his way across the hall, she had been seized with an overpowering fear—a fear of the unknown and the unexperienced. She expected to see him at any moment killed before her eyes. Every moment in his journey was an eternity of horror to her. As the doors closed on him, she fell back into her seat with a deadly faintness.

She turned to the guardsman. In spite of a

certain incapacity for controlling the motions of his eyes, he was a thorough gentleman.

'Citizen,' she said, in a low voice, 'I appeal to you as a man of honour. Help me to get home.'

Her appeal touched all that was most chivalrous in the young man's nature, and very gently he helped her through the thick crowd out of the gallery, down the stairs, and by a side door into the street.

The fresh air revived her. She had only a short way to go, and so, thanking her rescuer with a charming grace, she parted from him, and in a few minutes was back in her father's house.

The incident was significant of much. The agony of soul and faintness of body which she suffered was typical of the want of resistance in the girl's nature. Though not incapable of initiative, and even boldness, this long struggle to which she was called was too hard for her. She was meant for softer scenes and times. She had too little of the combative in her nature, and where a strong man would have revelled in the fight, she merely languished.

Ah, well, there are almost enough on the side of the War God. The meek, we are told, shall inherit the earth; and there are few of us who have not at times a dim intuition that meek womanhood has a secret unknown to the rest of us—unknown to the

militant, even of her own sex. This silence that seems so impotent, this suffering that seems so meaningless, this purity that seems so fastidious and unpractical, are, some of us love to dream, hints at a higher morality. Such life is a protest which cannot be altogether vain.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RESCUE

A FRESH breeze blew, sunshine poured down—generous, cheerful and serene—the sap seemed moving, and the leaves expanding on the trees of the Tuileries Gardens, and the waters of the Seine sparkled merrily. The atmosphere had that quality of lucid and transparent clearness which gives to Paris her peculiar, buoyant, intoxicating charm.

And yet over all things there hung a gloom which no sunshine could banish—nay, darkened by every ray. You felt it in the air. It was borne in on you imperceptibly by every casual sight—by the many darkened houses, the half-empty streets and the silent, restrained air of passers-by. It was not necessary to hear the restless murmur of the crowded prisons, or the dull rumble of the tumbrils over the Pont Neuf, to know that Terror was king.

Some of this gloom seemed to have penetrated

into the heart and mind of Louvier as he emerged from the hot hall of the Convention on the following afternoon. He had had a heavy day's work, intriguing, lobbying, speaking and writing, and he was feeling weary and sick at heart. A great change had come over him during the last three months, and the spruce and contented lover of April—healthy and fresh-coloured after the country life—had become the hollow-cheeked, restless-eyed, ill-dressed agitator of June.

He was devoured with the spirit of inquiet, the revenge of his revenge. Solitude had become hateful to him. Ubiquitous in the lobbies and in *salons*, a ceaseless attendant in the Convention, pervading the journals, his activity was portentous, abnormal, superhuman. It could not last!

And now he knew that a crisis was approaching. On the following day Robespierre would propose that law for the quickening of the guillotine, which he had foreshadowed in the Jacobins. Unless he could defeat it, the parties would be scattered, and the game lost.

It must be thwarted at all costs.

With this view, he had attended the meeting of the Jacobins in disguise; and with this view now he was on his way to a secret meeting at one of the *cafés* in the eastern quarter of the town.

There he would meet four men—Carnot, Tallien, Vadier and Boissy d'Anglas. All were leaders of

many others. All differed on every point except hatred to Robespierre. Would he be able to make them act together? He had turned aside from the Quai de l'Ecole into a small side street, intending to make a short cut.

But his way was blocked.

In front of him, right across the street, was a crowd of red-capped Parisian workmen and out-of-works—of the type that was thriving on the forty sous a day paid to the Revolutionary Committee-men—shouting, arguing, contradicting and exclaiming, all talking at once, with unspeakable clamour.

In the centre, by the wall of one of the houses, he could see a dark object, and hands rising and falling, as if delivering blows. He looked closer, and saw that the object was a man.

One of the crowd, keener-witted than the rest, was already attaching a rope to the chains of a street-lamp, suspended across the road.

Cries of '*A la lanterne !*' began to rise.

Louvier was not in a mood to pass by. He was almost glad of some object on which to spend his strength—something to fight. Without any hesitation he rushed into the middle of the throng, elbowing the men aside to right and to left.

They recognised a Deputy, and began to give way before him.

'What is all this nonsense?' he cried, roughly,

when the roars subsided for a moment, and he had pushed his way nearer the victim—gaining a point of vantage on one of the stones provided for riders to mount their horses.

He was answered by a sharp-faced little man whom he recognised as the President of the Revolutionary Committee in that section of Paris.

‘What *is* it, Citizen Deputy?’ he piped aloud, ‘Why, a terrible affair! A priest in Paris—disguised! How do we know that he was not on the way to massacre you?’

The conjecture was hardly obvious, and Louvier was accustomed to such uncalled-for solicitudes. He turned to their victim, and looked at him closely. The unhappy man had been driven back against the wall, bespattered with mud and filth, dazed and half stunned, and was now covering his eyes with both arms as if waiting for death. He was dressed in the costume of a *bourgeois* of the old days—knee-breeches and coat, both of simple black silk. But his hat had fallen, and there, plainly visible to all, on the bowed head was the tonsure of a priest. For a moment he removed his arms and looked round him with a dazed wonder.

Louvier started back with a great shock of pity and amazement. It was the Abbé Lemaître!

And then, as he looked at his worn, suffering face, and from that to the angry, bloodthirsty mob,

he remembered his youthful promise—the promise which he had given under the poplars of Arras eleven years ago.

The time had come to redeem it.

He turned to the crowd, and faced them boldly and authoritatively.

‘This is a nice state of affairs for this time of the day! What’s the use of our *belle mère*, the guillotine? Why have we given you committees in every section, and a just and rapid tribunal, if this is the way you’re still going to do your work?’

Inarticulate murmurs rose from the crowd, dumb-founded by this sudden attack. Louvier did not pause.

‘This was all very well in the old days of kings and ministers, when you had to defend yourselves, and there was none to help you—but now! when you see how hard we are working every day! By heavens, citizens, I am ashamed of you!’

Another deep murmur, half of rage and half of doubt, swept through the crowd.

For a moment things looked ugly. One tall man, bare-armed like a butcher, and carrying a hatchet, made a rush towards Louvier, crying, ‘Traitor! Down with him!’ But he was held back by his wiser friends.

‘Hear the Deputy out,’ they cried, and an old,

grey-headed man on the right nodded his head approvingly.

'Louvier's right,' he shouted. 'No more September for me ; its hard work and bad pay. Trust the guillotine, and she'll do our work.'

'No, she won't,' shouted another. 'They let off a forestaller only the other day.'

'The lantern's quicker and surer,' came another voice ; 'and no pretty speeches by the way.'

'And no mess—just a neat knot, a little tight about the throat.'

The Parisians were on a favourite theme.

Louvier was quick to note his advantage.

'Now, tell me, citizens, straight out,' he cried, 'do you want justice, or do you want murder ?'

'Justice !' cried a dozen voices.

'Then, is this the way to get it? Do you think that this is a proper trial, cracking jokes at the street corner ?'

There was an abashed silence.

'No, you don't. Then trust me, and let me take him with me and have him tried properly.'

It was a bold bid. Some awkward voice in the crowd might have even yet spoilt his game, by proposing to drag Lemaître before a Revolutionary Committee, or to the Public Prosecutor. But by this time Louvier's strong personal influence was making itself felt, and the crowd becoming momentarily more weak and undecided.

But there was one churlish, ugly-looking fellow who was more difficult to persuade.

‘It’s all very well to talk,’ he cried, ‘but, if we let him go, how do we know that he will ever be tried?’

‘Right,’ cried another. ‘I believe this Louvier is in league with the priests!’

‘Yes, see what St Just said the other day!’ cried a third, well up in his debates.

Louvier remembered the speech — a bitter, fanatical attack—and felt very uncomfortable.

But the name of St Just had ceased to carry weight.

‘Who cares for St Just,’ cried several. ‘Why, it was he who killed our Père Duchesne!’

‘Yes, and he who brought sneaking evidence against Danton.’

‘And he who wants us to dress like fools and behave like saints.’

‘Oh, he’s *fou*!’ cried others, pointing to their heads.

The friendly voice clinched the argument.

‘The Deputy’s right. We ought to trust men like him, or we shall never get on.’

‘But the man’s a suspect; I can see it,’ cried another.

‘Ah! you’ve got such good eyes that you see double,’ mocked the grey-haired man.

The crowd laughed. It was a good sign.

Louvier again seized the moment.

'Now, citizens, get back to your wives, and tell them that you have worked well for the Republic. The prisoner will come with me, and I will see to him. If he is guilty, I swear that he shall be punished by our *belle mère*.'

'That's the style, citizen ; she's our best friend.'

'You're the man for us, citizen.'

The hostile voices fell silent. The crowd had now fallen back and become loose and disjointed. Divided in opinion, it began to break into groups, discussing the situation.

Seeing the opportunity, Louvier slipped his arm round the old man, and gently moving him from the wall, whispered,—

'Quick, follow me ; we have not a moment to waste.'

Lemaître had been standing in a sort of stupor, but now he opened his eyes once more. It seemed as if he recognised Louvier for the first time.

'Louvier,' he said, 'is it you? Ah, I should have known ; a true friend never fails. Bless you ; may God bless you.'

'But come.'

'Nay, leave me. I am too near to the dark river.'

'For my sake, if not for yours. Keep close to me, and lean on my arm.'

The old man yielded, and they made their way rapidly through the crowd, many glowering like baulked beasts of prey, and few giving the road with any readiness.

They were quite close to his house, only some two hundred yards off. But Louvier was far too wise to go straight home. The crowd was still profoundly interested in his doings, and the greater number of them would probably have followed him, and spent the day outside his house, keeping an unsolicited watch over him and his friend. He was too skilled in Revolutionary tactics to be ignorant of a method for escaping a solicitous crowd. A cabriolet was standing in the open street outside the skirts of the crowd. He leapt into it, and dragged Lemaître after him.

‘Drive to the Place de la Bastille. Fast!’

CHAPTER XIX

RIPÆ ULTERIORIS AMOR

THROUGH devious by-streets they wound in and out, jolted to and fro on the hilly morasses that went for streets, and almost deafened with the din, until they reached the great, square, empty place, from which the ruins of the Bastille had scarcely yet been entirely removed. There Louvier suddenly bade the coachman turn, and, with constant changes of direction, took a winding course homeward until he reached his own house in the Rue St Honoré.

The last followers from the crowd had long been left behind, and the cabriolet drew up in front of his house, without exciting the observation of any passer-by. Louvier, however, had been trained to habits of caution, and he knew that the streets of Paris swarmed with spies. So he signed to the priest to remain sitting in the

vehicle while he went into the house and fetched a long, heavy cloak. He returned with it, and made the old man bury himself in its folds. Then at last he signed to him to leave the cab, and hurriedly they crossed to the door, and disappeared within. The pavement was so narrow that it was scarcely possible for anyone to have observed them.

He hurried the old man, now faint and unsteady from fatigue, through the hall and up several flights of stairs, until they reached a small room at the very top of the house. He wheeled in a small sofa from an adjoining room, and, making him recline on it, he poured down his throat a great mouthful of brandy. As the spirit coursed through his body, it aroused Lemaître from the half swoon into which he had sunk, and he raised himself on his elbow and looked round.

‘Where have you brought me to?’ he said.

‘Where else but to my own house?’ replied Louvier.

‘I see,’ said the Abbé, leaning back once more.

‘I see. I am a captive.’

‘Yes,’ said Louvier, ‘a captive of my bow and spear. But a captive with a difference—a captive for your own good. And now you must let me be your nurse as well as your gaoler.’

So saying, Louvier brought a great basin of water, a wig, and a new suit of his own clothes.

‘You will be properly disguised this time,’ he said, smiling.

The priest made no protest while Louvier washed off the mud that had been hurled at him by the crowd, covered his tonsure with an elegant wig, and substituted his clean and neat costume for the priest’s soiled clothes. This done, Louvier walked some way backward, and surveyed him critically, as an artist does a picture, from the other side of the room.

‘Why, you look for all the world like a young swell!’ he cried, as he surveyed his masterpiece. And, indeed, the slim, ascetic figure of the old priest was fitted to a nicety by the young man’s costume, and the grey hair being hidden under the powdered wig, there was nothing to denote his age, except the deep furrows of his wrinkled face.

The Abbé smiled responsively, but it was only for a moment. That look of haunting melancholy, which had of late become the abiding expression on his old face, resumed its sway. He leant back, very weak and exhausted, and a sigh of deep weariness came from him. It was easy for Louvier to see that the last week had been one of great suffering for him.

‘Do not speak to me of youth,’ he said, in his low voice, ‘my years are my only solace. They are the next best thing to that which would be the only complete solace—death itself.’

He paused for a moment, and then went on,—

‘Ah, Louvier, *mon cher*, why did you not let me die? Why did you drag me back when I was already looking down into the welcome depths—when I was ready for the martyr’s crown—when—’

Louvier made no reply, but crossed the room, and passing his arms gently round the old man, gave his shoulder as a pillow to his head. The action touched Lemaître as nothing else had done. The weary separation from his spiritual son, the long sorrow of the past year of exile, the weary yearning for his unshepherded flock, the bitter sense of a life given unstintedly for others in vain, the feeling of desertion by man and God—all these things were called into expression by this first touch of human sympathy. He laid his head on Louvier’s shoulder and wept like a child.

Louvier said nothing. There was a long silence between them.

At last, when the storm of feeling died down, Louvier began to speak again, gently and slowly.

‘Ah, my father,’ he said, ‘still, you do wrong to wish for death. If you do not live for your own sake, you must live for us—for a misguided world. We shall want you again. France is building on the sand, and it is to you who have built on the rock that we shall have to turn once more in the end.’

The Abbé raised himself to a sitting posture, strangely excited by these words.

'Ah, then,' he cried, 'you see that too, do you? And yet there was a time when I seemed to you to be speaking like a fool'—and the old man broke off as he remembered his long talks with the young Revolutionary and sceptic of ten years ago.

'Ah,' he went on, 'but we are all to blame. It is not only the rash and impious, not only those who thought to rebuild the world in a day, who have brought this upon us, but those, too, who were blind to the signs of the times—those who failed to deliver Christ's message to the high places of the world! Ah! he has been despised by us all!'

'Yes,' said Louvier, dropping his voice. 'And the people of France, the millions who long for happiness, but know so little how to gain it, are as sheep without a shepherd; they have lost the light from their heaven, and the leaders from their lives.'

Lemaître gave another deep sigh—the sigh of a broken heart.

'I—I am too old ever to lead again,' he muttered. 'I can do no more—I have lived my life. I die with the Old Order and leave others to lead the New.'

As the days went on, this utterance took on a

prophetic colour. It became doubtful whether Lemaître would ever leave the house again. The shock he had received in the streets, added to the long exposure in the sailing boat in which he had crossed from England, came as a last blow to a system already shaken by much suffering, by the poverty and loneliness of his persecution, and the perpetual dangers and fears of his exile and return.

But it was not until some weeks afterwards, weeks filled with intense experiences, that Louvier realised this.

CHAPTER XX

F E A R

EVEN in the storm and tumult of Lemaitre's rescue, Louvier had not forgotten his promised meeting at the *café* in St. Antoine. As soon as he could leave the old man, he hurried out to keep his engagement.

Age had put its stamp on the little decrepit, tottering house in one of the long rambling streets that ran out of the Rue St. Antoine, and the stairs seemed to creak and groan in angry protest as Louvier climbed from the little wine shop below to the dirty back room where the conspirators met.

The others were already there—Boissy d'Anglas, neatly dressed, sitting in a corner by the window serenely reading a journal; Carnot, thin-faced and keen-eyed, busily scanning some official papers; while Vadier and Tallien were talking eagerly, in low tones, sitting apart from the rest.

In front of them were two glasses and three bottles—two already empty.

Carnot and Boissy were both dressed simply—almost austere—and except for the regulation cockade, showed little colour. But about the costumes of the others there was something extravagant and violent that seemed to match the intensity of their lined, jaded, restless faces—a mixture of the heroic and the sordid—unclean linen and soiled coats, combined with great plumed hats, and brilliant, boastful sashes.

As Louvier entered, all looked up except Carnot, who seemed absorbed in his papers.

Louvier answered the unspoken question.

‘Citizens, receive my regrets. I have been delayed.’

Vadier and Tallien shot suspicious glances. Carnot put down his papers.

Boissy was the only one who spoke. He was a lazy, humorous fellow.

‘The time has been well spent,’ he said. ‘We have taken the measure of one another’s necks.’

But the others refused to laugh.

Silently they shifted their chairs, placing them round the little wooden table in the centre of the room. Vadier kept the wine bottle in front of him.

Louvier took the seat at the head of the table. They recognised in him the common influence.

Plunging straight into business, he put the situation before them tersely and briefly—described what he had seen and heard at the Jacobin Club, sketched the measure which Robespierre intended to bring forward, and ended by ominously hinting at its bearing on the lives and fortunes of those present. They all listened intently. When he had finished there was a silence.

It was broken by Vadier.

He hit the table heavily with his hand, making the glasses ring again. His utterance was somewhat thick.

'*Parbleu!*' he cried, 'we must act, or we are dead men.'

'Nonsense, man,' interrupted Tallien, rudely, 'it is only an administrative order—one must clear the prisons. It is only sanitary.'

'To clear the prisons, and to fill them,' said Louvier, quietly. 'With this law the immunity of the Convention goes.'

Up to this time no Deputy could be condemned without the consent of the Convention—which, though in most cases was a mere form, could become a reality at any moment, if the Convention felt itself attacked as a whole.

Boissy d'Anglas looked up.

'Then we are with you,' he said, quietly. 'Immunity is our watchword.'

Tallien snarled angrily.

'And we destroy Robespierre only to enthrone Citizen d'Anglas.'

Boissy smiled.

'Our motto is nothing for nothing.'

'Say, rather, everything for nothing.'

'Certainly, if we can.'

'Then know this,' hissed Tallien, leaning over towards Boissy, 'that we, too, give nothing for nothing. After Robespierre—you.'

'It pleases you to be playful,' said Boissy, very suavely.

'The tiger can play,' retorted Tallien.

It was the beginning of a fierce, angry debate, in which threats were bandied roughly to and fro, and both sides relied chiefly on fear as an argument. Louvier broke in now and again with a conciliatory phrase, but, after an hour's debate, his task still seemed hopeless. To combine Tallien and Boissy seemed as hopeless as the effort to wed fire and water.

All this time Carnot had been sitting silently listening, looking from one to another of the speakers with his keen, shrewd eyes. His mind seemed to be far away, and, for aught that any observer could tell, might have been absorbed in one of those mathematical problems that he so dearly loved. But, in a pause of the storm, he groped in his pocket, and produced a paper.

He calmly unfolded it, and handed it to Louvier.

'It is a document,' he remarked, casually, 'that may be of some interest to the present company.'

Louvier scrutinised it.

'What is the meaning of this?' he asked, amazed.

'It is a paper which came into my hands in a curious manner. A few nights ago I was dining with Barras at Clichy, and had occasion to search in the pockets of my coat for some papers. It was hanging next to Robespierre's. The day was hot and we were dining somewhat *à la sansculotte*. My hand blundered into his pocket. I drew forth that.'

'And its meaning?'

'Is simple. You will notice the heading. "Citizens of whom I am doubtful." You will also notice the paper; it bears the stamp of the Tribunal.'

Carnot took up the official papers before him and began to peruse them, as if he was tired of the subject. As he did so, he added,—

'My name heads the list, that is why I am here.'

'It is an important paper,' said Louvier; 'perhaps I had better hand it round.'

And he gave it to Vadier.

Vadier did not read it. He caught a glimpse, which satisfied him.

'*Par la sanguienne !*' he exclaimed, and handed it on.

Tallien tarried little longer. His eye seemed riveted by one name. He laughed grimly and handed it to Boissy.

Boissy was the only one who looked it carefully through.

'Thanks,' he said, with a genial smile, and handed it back to Louvier. 'It contains nothing new to me.'

Louvier rose and took up his hat.

'Is there anything more?' he said.

'There is nothing more,' said Tallien.

'And you will be there to-morrow?'

'We shall be there to-morrow.'

And one by one they went out.

Carnot stayed on, still perusing his papers, and now and then helping himself calmly from a snuff-box.

But once he smiled.

CHAPTER XXI

OMENS

IT was a few minutes past nine o'clock on the following morning in the great Convention Hall in the Tuileries, and yet every seat on the hard wooden benches was already filled. The lines of gloomy, determined faces rose in circular tier above circular tier from the floor below to the densely crowded galleries above—harsh, stern, weary faces, as of men who were marching through the Valley of the Shadow. Already a tumult of sound arose from the packed, disorderly mob in the galleries above—divided from the seats of the Deputies by the thinnest partition—and the formal reading of a long, droning, tedious petition drew little attention. For a crisis was at hand.

On the previous evening St Just had introduced the terrible law which Robespierre had fore-

shadowed at the Jacobin Club. Without any delay, Robespierre was pressing it through. He knew that once he had passed the clause depriving the Convention of its immunity, there was little else in the measure to which any members of that body, demoralised by intrigue, and deaf to the cry of the innocent, would raise any objection. He had hoped to pass it in the early morning—before the Convention was full.

But now, as he looked round the rows of faces from the little corner seat whence it was his wont to survey the Convention, Robespierre began to feel a new anxiety. For these were no friends of his. High up on those exalted seats, which had given rise to the name of 'Mountain,' sat the remnants of those who had followed Danton—prominent among them Tallien. Why had he stayed his hand, and not completed the purge which he had begun?

His eye travelled lower, and fell on the crowded group of men who sat on the low benches that had given to them the name of the 'Plain.' It was no usual sight to see the lazy, lethargic Boissy there at this early hour, and Robespierre marked it with a frown. But who was that moving up the narrow gangway from the Plain to the Mountain. He had just been speaking to Boissy; was it possible that he was now moving towards Tallien?

Yes, it was. Sidling along the bench, the figure

bent down and whispered something in Tallien's ear. Tallien smiled, and gave a coarse, loud laugh. The speaker turned towards Robespierre. A ray of light, piercing through a rift in the monumental structure of pasteboard and plaster with which the hall was cumbered, fell full on his face. It was Louvier!

Robespierre gave an angry movement of disgust. Ah! That fatal habit of mercy again! Had he not enough evidence to kill Louvier five times over? Why had he bound himself by that miserable pledge? Why, having given it, had he kept it?

He knew only too well; and for the moment he cursed the blind passion which had come across the line of his political schemes, and built up against him an implacable and inviolable enemy. But what did it matter? How could he, the powerful Robespierre, be injured by one insignificant man?

He had many followers. Where were they?

He glanced at the benches near him. His eye fell on Carnot. Why had he taken lately to seat himself so far away? Why did he never consult him—defer to him? As Robespierre looked, Carnot raised his eyes and met Robespierre's. But there was no faintest mark of greeting—only a stony, indifferent stare. What could it mean?

But now his eyes ended their survey at the little group who sat nearest to him on the same bench,

at some little distance. Framed in masses of long unkempt hair, their faces bore the stamp of ruthless power—haggard and sear-eyed with ceaseless toil. For these were the organisers of the Terror—Collot d'Herbois and Billaud Varennes. They were reading the bill intently.

Robespierre withdrew his gaze with a pout of disgust. At any rate he was saved from such allies as these. Little did they know, when they smiled at the bill, for whom it was intended.

Suddenly Collot turned, as if drawn by Robespierre's gaze. He edged along the seat, and spoke loudly,—

'This is a bill which does thee credit, citizen. *Grand Dieu!* it will clear the prisons nicely. I shall have little more trouble with those worrying gaolers, who are always complaining to me of the crowding.'

Robespierre drew back.

'I trust,' he said, 'I trust that no innocent man will perish by this law.'

Billaud laughed hoarsely.

'When a man opposes the Republic he ceases to be innocent. The safety of the people is a supreme law.'

'Yes,' said Robespierre, 'if the people aim at virtue.'

'And virtue is—what the people aim at.'

Robespierre scowled.

‘Collot,’ he said, ‘have respect for my scruples, or I may have none in regard to you.’

Collot laughed.

‘Thy scruples, citizen, are like the birds—they migrate at will.’

‘Have a care that *you* do not migrate without a will.’

Collot’s eyes flashed at this retort ; but, before he could reply, their attention was diverted elsewhere. For the game had begun.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FIRST BLOW

A YOUNG Deputy, named Bourdon de l'Oise, had risen from his place by the side of Louvier, mounted the tribune, and was moving the rejection of the provision. Robespierre paled as he heard the low murmurs of applause that formed a running *obligato* to Bourdon's short, sharp, forcible speech. His arguments had the more weight as coming from one who was above suspicion as a supporter of the Republic—one whose missions in the provinces and speeches in the Convention had earned him a reputation as a zealous Republican Deputy. He insisted that, with such a provision, the Convention would be shorn of all its privileges. No member would be able to call his life his own!

As he ended, Robespierre rose from his seat and

walked rapidly to the tribune. So quick was he that the two men met and jostled on the high staircase leading up to the rostrum, and it was with some difficulty that Bourdon could push himself by. The other members who had risen resumed their seats, the President sounded his bell, and Robespierre began.

His defence was astute and satirical, and the Convention and galleries raged with the conflicting passions which it roused. His short, rasping sentences, barbed with anger, again and again hit the mark. Very cleverly he played round the claim for immunity put forward by a body that talked of equality.

‘You speak of equality,’ he said, ‘and yet you desire that you yourselves should be privileged. You are passing a law to regulate the workings of Republican justice, and yet you wish that you yourselves should be exempt from it.’

He was answered with hoarse murmurs. He went on,—

‘What does this mean? Will you pass laws for others to which you do not wish to submit yourselves? Is the ruler to be above the law? Is not that your quarrel with the old kings and nobles—that they enacted laws for others to which they would not submit themselves? Are you, too succumbing to the vulgar temptation of rulers, and trying to become kings?’

The Convention was in a turmoil of doubt, and confused, inarticulate discontent.

‘No, Robespierre, it is you who would be king,’ muttered Tallien, loud enough for his fellow Dantonists to hear, but not daring as yet to shout such phrases aloud.

Robespierre spoke effectively, and in any other cause he would have won. But he was aiming at a point where men are not likely to be touched by oratory. He was asking the members of the Convention to give their lives into his hands. They could hear the clank of the axe through the din of words.

Louvier rarely spoke, and he had no intention of doing so on the present occasion, but as he listened to the closing sentences of Robespierre’s speech, and heard the conflict of murmurs with which it was received, he realised that the issue still hung undecided, and might go against him. The fire kindled within him. He rose and advanced towards the tribune.

Close behind the tribune was a small gallery, veiled with curtains, in which friends of the committees or the President were from time to time given the privilege of occupying seats. It was to one of these seats that Robespierre was fond of bringing Elise on great occasions in the Convention. There she was sitting now. As Louvier came forward, she had pushed aside the curtain

from the front of her gallery, pale with excitement. The tribune was so near that as he mounted the steps their eyes met at close quarters. They looked into one another's souls for one moment, and then she drew the curtain with a motion of agonised weariness. All that he could read in those eyes during that moment of meeting was fear and pain. And yet was he not doing her work? Was, then, all his toil for nothing? He mounted the remaining steps of the tribune with woe in his heart. But in a few moments the passion of speech swept over him, and he forgot all in the oblivion of that surrender.

He surpassed himself—at one bound he stepped into fame as an orator. His speech was a revelation to the Convention, and an amazement to himself. Not only so, but it was a speech that persuaded—a speech that made history. The wavering members wavered no longer. The cowards shook off their pusillanimity; the brave rose to the heights of their bravery.

‘There was a Roman emperor,’ he cried, ‘who wished that all his nobility had one neck, so that he might have cut it off at one sweep. Cannot you see, citizens, that that is the aim of this measure? Cannot you see that this will make the necks of this assembly *one*?’

His bold questions were punctuated by wild shouts of applause; but the croaking interruptions

of Couthon could be heard from his side of the hall.

‘Mind your own neck!’ he cried, losing all control.

Louvier turned round on him in a flash of splendid anger.

‘Yes, that is what it has come to in this free state; the deadly sin is to speak freely. But death has no terrors for me. Come, Couthon, do your worst! Bring your guillotine; lay me on the plank; be my executioner! I bare my neck to you.’

In the excitement of the moment, he seized his cravat and tore it off, throwing it down on the floor beneath. There he stood high up in the tribune, with his throat bare, and his long hair falling down his neck, an heroic figure.

Couthon croaked out a little mocking laugh, but Louvier was ready for him. Pointing to Couthon with long, outstretched finger, he drew all eyes to the little cripple in his corner.

‘Ha, he laughs! he laughs already! It is the laugh of triumph. He thinks that he and his faction have already won. He sees our heads in the little basket.’ Then, with a sudden change of feeling and disdainful turn of the finger towards the rest of the Convention, ‘*Poltrons! Laches!* Weak fools—to fall before a paralytic, a fanatic, and a pedant! What a triumvirate! Who will pity you?’ And, with finger lifted, while the whole

Convention hushed to hear him, he ended,—‘Listen! I can hear the laughter of posterity—through the long, long ages they laugh—they laugh at your fate; they mock at you because they despise you! They despise you because you delivered yourselves over to the slaughterers! They laugh because you fell before a trio of weaklings—lambs given over to the slaughter! Who cares for men that do not help themselves? They fall, and they are forgotten!’

By common consent, Louvier’s speech was accepted as the end of the debate. Couthon whispered to Robespierre, suggesting a reply; but he shook his head impatiently.

‘It is impossible,’ he said, ‘impossible that they should follow him against *me*.’

He was misled by his egoism. As the serried ranks of Deputies rose in their seats, it became clear that the provision was defeated. By an overwhelming majority it was cut out of the measure. The rest of the law was passed, and the Convention broke up in confusion, amid the shouts and yells of the now uncontrollable galleries.

.

Louvier had won the first rubber, but between him and his rejoicing there came the troubled, puzzled face of the young girl whose cause he was fighting—hurt by the very violence which was meant for her saving, and separated from him by

his very attempts to remove the cause of their alienation. And as he remembered it, the feeling of momentary triumph gave way to a melancholy anxiety for the future—full of vague terrors and possibilities of suffering ; for of what use would be success itself if he missed the only object for his dreadful work ?

CHAPTER' XXIII

A FALL

WHEN the Marquis de Saens had found that the Abbé Lemaître was really serious in his determination to return to France, he had shrugged his shoulders despairingly, and ceased to prolong the argument. Such fruitless struggles against impending fate, such instinctive acts of self-annihilation, seemed to him a mere throwing of good after bad. Looking at life in the clear, cool light of a highly-cultured mind, he could see no place in it for self-sacrifice of the emotional, inevitable, irrational kind—the self-sacrifice that acts because it must.

Thus it was that he had no thought of accompanying Lemaître. Even if Louvier were suffering for helping them, the penalty came for his own friends. He had pressed this view on the priest.

'After all, it is his own fault if his wings are scorched,' he had said. 'He need not have flown so near the flame.'

The priest had looked at De Saens with his deep eyes, and formed his own judgment. He seemed to see a dead hand laid on all the better energies of De Saens's character ; the hand of a dead order, paralysing activity, and checking sympathy with the mocking reminder of past failures. When would that frozen stream feel the releasing touch ?

'Ah!' he said, sadly, '*you* are far from the flame.'

Then he went his way.

And De Saens—what did he do ?

He did not relinquish the American scheme ; but, somehow or other, it hung fire. Perhaps it was some touch of compunction that made him loth to leave until more certain of the old man's fate ; or, more probably, that element of cultured indolence which always stood between De Saens and action, combined with an acute but lazy habit of observation which left him contented with the spectacle of human life, wherever he looked on it.

How much there was to interest and fascinate in that life of the exiled French nobility ! Here was a whole society of human beings, rich and poor, employers and employed, torn from their ancient moorings, and cast adrift in the casual flood of foreign life. In that wreck of things,

some sank by the way, some took what help they could find, and lived on charity, while others, too proud for dependence, and too honest for begging, struggled on in uncomplaining solitude, bravely buffeting the storm, but ever gay and cheerful.

It was among the last that De Saens now moved. They were chiefly the better class of French provincial nobility, divided both in interest and tastes from the Parisian nobles. All day they worked at whatever occupation came uppermost—teaching, tailoring, selling, translating, cooking—anything to earn the bread of exile. But in the summer evenings they shook off care, and they would join together for rambles and picnics in the fields and woods of Maida Vale or Kensington, or meet in one another's rooms for supper, dance or song.

In all these pleasures De Saens took his share—partly from a certain curiosity, and partly from a real love for the social side of life. His days, indeed, were spent in weary toil over unwelcome articles which he wrote for a bare livelihood—for he was unwilling to spend the five thousand francs he had brought with him, which he was now keeping for his American journey. But in the evenings he would join a small circle in wanderings through the flowered meadows, and in gay laughter and talk almost forget his troubles.

There were many in that circle who afterwards

looked back on those days as the happiest in their lives. For out of the soil of common drudgery there blossomed many a flower of human love and sympathy, and, however bitter with exile, their bread was never watered with others' tears. They were getting their accounts straight. Nay, they were placing the world in their debt.

'Why do you never complain?' De Saens one day asked one of the party, a young French nobleman who had lost fortune and relatives by the Revolution.

'Fate laughs at grumblers, but silence wearies her,' he answered, lightly.

'But you—she can hit you no further—she has done her worst.'

'Even so, it is best to be polite to her—one never rebukes a lady, however old.'

Such was the philosophy of the exiles—proof against every turn of fortune. Their urbanity and perfection of polish came to the rescue. Hit hard by fortune, they never returned the blow. Driven from their own land, they built their pavilions of pleasure with sore hands and aching hearts in another land. Their instinctive desire to please placed a barrier on the lips, and forbade them to display their sorrow.

Not that they underwent any sudden repentance or reformation of character. There were many young men among the emigrants who still

in the midst of their work carried on the habits of gambling learnt in prosperity, and would go home from the early dances or gatherings to finish the night at the card-table. Accustomed to this stimulant from early days, they scarcely found a sufficient antidote in a city where everyone worshipped the goddess Chance, from the highest nobleman to the smallest link-boy.

De Saens was a bad gamester, and cared for the sport little. At a crisis of the game his mind would be away in Paris, or, speeding ahead of his lethargic will, on the prairies of America. But he was fond of the gamesters' company, and, with a characteristic want of moral resistance, he often joined them at the table.

This dalliance ended in a catastrophe.

It was very late one hot night in June—about two o'clock—when he and his friends were playing in a badly-lighted upper room off the Strand. Two candles, burning low, shed an inconstant light on the heaps of cards and little piles of money that littered a large, bare table. Wine bottles lay about in confusion, and round the table stood several watching the turns of the game. The whole company was characterised by a certain shabbiness, in marked contrast to their graceful bearing and courtly manners. The stakes had at first been small, but had been gradually increased as the passion grew. De

Saens had been playing absently — almost automatically—when he suddenly awoke to the discovery that he had lost heavily.

The man to whom he was losing was one who, in the ruin of his fortunes, looked mostly to the gambling table for his subsistence; but even he was startled at the nonchalant indifference of De Saens's play, almost like that of a man in his sleep.

He held back his card for a brief moment.

'M. le Marquis,' he said, gravely, 'I have not the honour of your attention.'

De Saens started and looked at his cards.

He looked up.

'How much do I owe you?'

'A thousand francs.'

He half rose from his chair as if to go. His hand was lowered to throw down his cards. For he knew in his heart of hearts that such play was madness for him, and meant the ruin of his plans.

A thousand francs! Already it spelt the crippling of his resources. Already it threw doubt on the wisdom of going to America.

A passionate impulse swept over him. No! He had gone too far! He must win it back! He would play on.

He sat down once more and raised his cards.

'It is your turn, I think,' he said, '*faites votre jeu.*'

In silence they played on. The bystanders leaned forward to watch the game more closely. There was nothing to be heard but the smack of the cards as they rapidly followed one another.

The candles flickered, and the shadows performed a grotesque war dance on the wall.

The stakes rose more rapidly. They were now playing in hundreds. At first De Saens won slightly, and then his antagonist suddenly gained on him. Again and again he lost. There was another pause. His partner again withheld his hand.

‘Marquis,’ he said, ‘the luck is not with you, you have lost four thousand francs—shall we finish to-morrow night?’

De Saens compressed his lips. There was an angry flash in the eye.

‘It is my play, I think?’

‘It is.’

‘Then that is my card.’

They played on.

And De Saens still lost.

Suddenly he rose.

‘I owe you five thousand?’

‘That is the sum.’

‘Thank you—it is all I possess at present.’

His partner rose, and all stood in silence while he groped for his hat and cane, and staggered from the room. He fumbled his way down the darkened

stairs and into the open street, almost knocking down the old watchman who was wearily crying the hour.

A few minutes afterwards he was alone with the stars and his thoughts.

For several hours he continued pacing the streets of London and anathematising his own folly. As the passion died away he began to see his conduct quite clearly. Here was his one chance of escape from the old world into a new atmosphere of life and thought, and he had thrown it away in exchange for a few hours amusement!

He looked back through the last few years of his life, and saw himself tracked at every point by the same weakness of will and absence of disciplined strength. He pictured his own character as a mere passive mass of clay ready to be moulded by any chance potter of circumstance—now turned in one direction by the force of the Revolution, now in another by the strength of reaction, and finally succumbing to the mere accidental influence of irresponsible companions. He saw in himself no strength of resistance, no shaping force, no commanding will. 'And yet,' he cried, in the agony of the introspection, 'and yet it is upon such a basis that we hope to build a stable society! Men of broken character, of waxen will and selfish purpose, we offered ourselves to the French nation

as leaders and teachers! What wonder that they have turned to others!'

He was in a self-castigatory humour, and took a sort of fierce pleasure in the discipline. Like some fanatical flagellant, he aimed his strokes at all his weakest spots, and in a few hours drank the very dregs of humiliation.

CHAPTER XXIV

NEW SCHEMES

‘WHEN do you think that we shall arrive in Paris?’

‘In September, monseigneur, I should judge.’

‘A bad time for moving—the theatres are dull, and the days getting short.’

‘For my part, I shall ask Monsieur for the post of Ambassador at St James’s.’

‘Ah! but it will save us another of these dreadful London winters. Anything but that!’

A little shiver went round the elegant company assembled at the table of the emigrant General de Puisaye, in the pretty little London house which had been lent to him by a London sympathiser. It was a distinguished company which had assembled there that evening, or a company that would have been distinguished a few years before—ex-barons, ex-judges, ex-bishops and ex-

generals, all waiting to resume their functions. They had waited a long time already—some five years.

De Saens had been surprised to receive an invitation into such company, and he had come with reluctance. In the month that had intervened since the loss of his money he had gone through much, and he had little heart for the society of those who were commonly called the 'coxcomb emigrants.' But De Puisaye had spoken urgently of a new scheme of chivalrous invasion and return to France at the point of the bayonet—a scheme which fell on De Saens in a favourable mood.

For since the loss of his money had cut him off from all possibility of leaving Europe, and thrown him entirely on his own resources, he had been driven to a life of grinding and irksome toil. His little social pleasures had become impossible, and, too proud to enjoy a hospitality he could not return, he had instinctively come to move in a poorer circle of emigrants—the cousins and the younger sons of provincial nobles, the great crowd of exiled country priests, and all those members of society, like old servants, whose lives had been too closely bound up with the nobility to outstay their departure.

Few of these poor people had been able to bring any savings with them in their hurried and terrified flight; most of them were ignorant of the

English language, and entirely unfamiliar with English manners and customs; nearly all of them had lost all chance of resuming their accustomed occupations, and few of them could adapt themselves to another. They were like the ivy when the elm is cut down—forlorn and widowed.

As ever with the poor, their only solid consolation was to be found among themselves. After their day's work, or search for work, they would meet in some half-furnished room or sordid garret, and share their slender diet. There, in the long evenings, they would laugh and talk as if the heavens were still bright above them; there they would discuss every problem of politics and religion with the tolerant, sceptical freedom of the old society; and there they would sit and tell 'sad stories of the death of kings,' the ignominious execution of Louis XVI., and the melancholy fading of his little son, glad to leave a world that had no welcome for him. Or at another time they would try to pierce the dark veil of uncertainty that shrouded their future fortunes, and to dream of a happy return to their fatherland. But there were many who would never return. Even while they laughed and talked, the shadow of death was over them constantly, and one after another they would drop out of the race, weary of the hard fate of the children whose teeth are set on edge.

There was one whose fate De Saens afterwards

recalled with especial sadness. He was a brilliant young violinist who, in ordinary days, would have had a great career before him. But he had joined in the Valmy campaign, and on the retreat that became a rout he had caught a fever which had ended in consumption. When De Saens met him he was evidently dying, but as he grew worse the ruling passion seemed to grow stronger, and on many a sad, weary evening, when they were too tired to talk, they would listen hour after hour to the plaintive voice of that instrument, which seems to speak to man with his own voice, but in magic words unknown to any mortal tongue.

Sound holds the key to memory, and Olivier especially revelled in the tunes which were most popular in France just before the Revolution. Perhaps it was the dance music which affected them most keenly. As he poured out gavotte after gavotte, and minuet after minuet, a dead silence would fall on all, they would close their eyes, and, in imagination, they would live once more through the bright scenes of the Old Order, and dismantled chateaux would rise again, gay and bright with dance and song, in the enchanted imagination of their exiled inhabitants.

De Saens took every possible means in order to prolong this young man's life. He shook off his pride, and by means of persistent begging managed to secure such medical advice as could

be obtained at 'that time. He persuaded his friends to spare sufficient from their scantily-filled purses to provide him with some precious comforts, and to give him a better lodging than most.

But all was in vain. One evening, when he was playing a gavotte full of the haunting melancholy that breathes through some of that dance music, his playing gradually grew weaker, and the bow seemed to slacken in his grasp. The theme of the gavotte recurred more and more slowly, and the spirit seemed to die out of it, until it stopped altogether. The eyes of the young player glazed, and he fell back into their arms—dead!

It was from such scenes and such company that De Saens, drawn by the hope of some alternative to this wretched, passive suffering, had passed to De Puisaye's dinner-party. He felt an instinctive distaste for the new surroundings. Opposite him sat a young French noble in a Hungarian uniform, while at his side was a Bishop—one of the 'martyr-bishops'—in a long, rich cassock of watered silk. He found himself in a new atmosphere—an atmosphere of vain conceit and illusion, maintaining itself with entire indifference to all the facts of their life. To them the Revolution was still a revolt, and the old life was to return precisely as before—as selfish, as luxurious, as immoral.

Poor De Puisaye! He was one of those who

are born with a faculty for not seeing—a sort of fatuous hopefulness, quite distinct from charity, that led him to build on the shifting sands of weak characters and impotent wills. And now it was characteristic of him to pour out to this audience, in excited *staccato* utterance, all the details of a new scheme of invasion—one of those multitudinous schemes which ever floated before the eyes of the emigrants, as a means of restoring them to a grateful people and a repentant tenantry.

They were to raise a force of emigrants—to land in Brittany—be accepted with open arms by the peasantry—and then, helped by the English and by a really Royalist France, conquer the ‘Reds,’ march on Paris, and restore the Monarchy—*voilà tout!* Could anything be more simple?

The company listened somewhat indifferently. Perhaps they had heard something of the same sort before. Besides, a good dinner had a way of removing difficulties.

When De Puisaye had finished, there was a silence—at last broken by the Bishop.

‘And when we get back, and begin to divide the land again,’ said he, ‘the only just principle will be to give the larger share to those who left the sooner.’

He had left very early.

‘One thing is certain,’ said another, who had been a great landlord, ‘we must have no more of those peasant proprietors.’

‘And I hope,’ said a third, who had been high in the official ranks of the old *régime*, ‘that His Majesty will not hesitate to use the wheel—I could not govern again without it.’

‘The wheel?’ said another, contemptuously—‘it is too light, these villains should be burnt.’

‘Ah! what a lesson it all is!’ sighed the Bishop. ‘If only our good King had not abolished the *lettres de cachet*! They were so convenient!’

De Saens caught De Puisaye’s eye, and saw the look of despair growing there.

‘Let not him that girdeth his harness on boast himself as he that putteth it off,’ he murmured to himself, looking round.

Perhaps there was something in his look and his silence that attracted De Puisaye, weary of the hollow conceit of the others.

As he was rising to go he felt a touch on his arm. It was a young footman.

‘The Marquis presents his compliments, and wishes you to stay.’

And so De Saens stayed. And De Puisaye opened his soul to him.

Through the long night they sat in the great lonely dining-room, with its heavy panelled walls and handsome ceiling, earnestly discussing. The candles burnt low in their sockets, and heavy shadows seemed to gather in the out-of-the-way

corners of the old room, but neither noticed it, for on their talk hinged the lives of thousands.

De Puisaye argued passionately, but—or so it seemed to De Saens—with a sort of conscious weakness. The peasantry, he said, would welcome them as deliverers, and the deserters would come over in thousands.

De Saens almost laughed aloud.

‘Desert?’ he cried, ‘who deserts from a winning cause?’

‘You forget that we are their masters,’ said De Puisaye, haughtily.

‘We *were*.’

‘And then there are the peasantry and the prisoners of war.’

‘But the peasantry are unarmed.’

‘We shall give them arms.’

‘They are undrilled.’

‘We shall drill them.’

‘We are undrilled ourselves.’

‘We shall learn.’

De Saens paused. Such optimism seemed impregnable.

‘Prisoners of war are not the best fighters,’ he hazarded.

‘We shall feed them.’

‘Some soldiers want a cause as well.’

De Puisaye laughed.

‘One would think you were a Jacobin, my dear

Marquis. What does a common soldier want with a cause? It is all very well for us; but for a soldier—good wine and sausages, regular pay. What more is required?’

De Saens held his peace. Of what use was it to protest against this spirit, untaught by all the stern lessons of the last five years? If those voices were not heard, of what avail would be his?

At last De Puisaye turned on him, and put the question which he had really sent for him to answer.

‘*In fine*, Marquis, will you come? You are just the type we want—disinterested, industrious and austere. We shall have enough triflers and carpet-soldiers. Come, now, say that you will?’

De Saens did not answer at once, but remained deep in thought. True, it was a hopeless quest. But the conversation of his fellow-guests had filled him with a bitter revulsion from the blind and complacent indolence of his order, so brave in words and so void of deeds. This undertaking might at any rate serve as a protest. His death—for he regarded it as scarcely possible that he should return alive—would have in it a redeeming quality. There were sins to be wiped out, and he heard the call to take part in the work of atonement. Besides, there was the strong personal desire to have some task which, by occupying all his nights and days, and taking up every energy of

soul and body, would still the pain of living, and give relief to the heavy anguish of exile. Here—in the organising, recruiting and drilling necessary for their undertaking—he would find such a sedative. It would be better than amateur teaching and desultory writing.

De Puisaye had repeated the question, but De Saens still made no reply. Perceiving his absorption, the other rose and moved towards the window. With an impatient gesture, he threw back the heavy curtains, and a flood of early morning light—that white light that comes before the dawn—streamed into the old panelled room and outshone the guttering candles.

The light caught De Saens's eye, attuned to the gloom, and he started as if struck.

Then he looked up towards De Puisaye and smiled.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘the light calls to me. I accept the omen, and I come.’

CHAPTER XXV

AT BAY

IT was nearing the end of July in Paris, and the Terror had reached its climax. Passed without its essential clause, the Law of Prairial had gone on acting like some hideous, mindless, meaningless machine. The crowded prisons of Paris were emptied in shoals. Great throngs of prisoners were dragged before the four Tribunals and driven to the guillotine like sheep to the slaughter—tried without counsel or witnesses, condemned wholesale, and executed in great indiscriminate batches. Such batches were composed of men and women of every different class and opinion, young and old, Royalists and Republicans, rich and poor, Christians and atheists, clerics and laymen, rustics and townsmen, workmen and shopkeepers. There was no discoverable sign of method. It was the mere meaningless carnival of the dying Terror—slaking its greedy thirst before the end.

But Paris has an unfailing opiate for its seasons of stress and storm in that life of the senses which she calls *gaiety*, and which has in its gift a magic power of oblivion for its chosen worshippers. Though fear still hung over the city and kept business stagnant and the streets empty, the theatres were never so full, nor the *cafés* so crowded from morning till night with chattering, gaily-dressed throngs. But in the unceasing flow of talk the struggles in the Convention were scarcely referred to. They were both dangerous and dull. The present faction was unintelligible; past heroes were forgotten. Danton and Camille Desmoulins had gone down to an unwept grave—and were forgotten.

Anyone of the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, who could by some miracle have been enabled to listen to the hubbub of talk in the *café* Corazza, off the Tuileries Gardens, on the afternoon of July 24th, 1794, would have found it very difficult to realise the time of day. Most of the frequenters were talking fervently, but it was all on war matters, and many were drawing imaginary plans on the tables to illustrate their points. The Napoleonic enthusiasm, such a listener would have thought, had begun already.

In the midst of the din of words, there was a sudden hush, and many faces were turned towards the door with a half-frightened, half-interested

look. There was a moment of indecision, and then nearly the whole of those seated in the *café* rose to their feet. The waiters rushed to the door and held it obsequiously open, while three somewhat primly-dressed individuals, one of them terribly lame, and hobbling on sticks, made their way through the *café*, bowing to right and left. The frequenters of the *café* bowed back, some of them effusively, and others in a stolid manner, as if performing a reluctant duty. The three passed through the public room, and disappeared up a back staircase, escorted by the proprietor of the establishment. The gossipers and pleasure-seekers resumed their seats, and for a few moments there was a curious silence over the room, as if a forbidden topic had been started. And then first one and then another began to talk again—about the war.

The three men were Robespierre, Couthon and St Just.

They climbed the narrow staircase behind the public room, and made their way to a little upper chamber, which the owner of the *café* lent them as a special privilege, and where, looking from the window over the gardens, they were able to drink their coffee in peace. The room was by no means large, but it was comfortably furnished, and a favourite resort for all three.

While the other two sat sipping their coffee

with the seeming calm of middle age, young St Just walked hastily and angrily to and fro like a caged tiger. He had refused the proffered cup. This was not the time for the light pleasures of life. Youth may often be starved of experience, but there is frequently a compensation in the greater clearness of eye and simplicity of perception, looking through the maze of life, and catching without hesitation at the saving clue. At any rate, he was the only one of those three that realised to the full the intensity of the crisis with which they were faced.

These three men were at this moment virtually alone in France, though nominally supreme. By the foiled and detected blow of the Law of Prairial, Robespierre had alienated the Convention more than by any successful stroke. He had revealed his intentions without carrying them out. He had shown them that he was dangerous, but not that he was strong.

The combination between the surviving Dantonists and Hébertists on the one hand, and the Plain on the other, was growing stronger every day.

St Just alone saw this. And now he was talking quickly and angrily.

'*Les cochons!*' he cried. 'This is no time for threats; what we want is deeds. My advice is to sweep them away. Why should the Republic be

impeded by such miscreants—blackguards, thieves, murderers, adulterers?’ He paused for a moment, overcome by passion. He had only returned from the wars a few days before, and was still filled with indignation at the state of things he had discovered. When he resumed, it was more deliberately. ‘Let us strike quickly and mercifully—for justice is the highest mercy!’

As he spoke, a hectic flush came into the austere face of the young Revolutionary, furrowed by deep lines of thought and passion, bespeaking a nature that had lived for years under such unnatural strain and stress as had brought him to the age of twenty-seven, with an experience that does not often weight the character of a man of fifty.

Such precocity has its inevitable price. Nature is not to be hurried in her purposes, and the intensity of such a life is purchased at the expense of its length. St Just was an instance of the devastating power possessed by those crowded years of human life—a man who in more temperate times might have gradually risen to high posts of distinction, but who now in these stormy years had already almost finished his course, scorched and burnt like some poor human moth in the fierce Revolutionary flame. Who shall say which should have the greater blame for this tragedy—the Old Order or the New? Neither seemed to have any roof to put over the head of such spirits,

ruthlessly unhoused by the downfall of the social fabric.

Robespierre looked affectionately at his disciple. The ardent and fanatical zeal of the young man precisely fulfilled his ideals of virtue.

'Ah,' he thought, 'would that I had others as eager, as fresh, as competent, as single-eyed as this young man! Would that others were as disinterested, as pure!'

But he knew that such zeal was rare, and he feared the counsels of St Just, as the counsels of one whose ardour outran his discretion. For Robespierre called his timidity prudence, and was proud of it, just as he called his fastidiousness virtue, and wrapped himself in it as a cloak.

'Peace, *mon ami*,' he now said to St Just, 'peace. Your generous anger carries you away; you forget our difficulties.' He sipped his coffee and looked out over the gardens. 'We must go slowly,' he murmured, almost to himself.

St Just gave a gesture of dissent. He stopped for a moment in his hurried walk, and sat down on a chair by the window. He looked out on the gay throngs of careless Parisians promenading joyously in the long walk, blissfully ignorant that the destinies of France were being decided so close at hand. He was not easily to be shaken from his conviction. He was silent for a moment, and then suddenly burst out again.

‘You are wrong, Robespierre,’ he said. ‘I say it with respect, but you are wrong. With all your oratory you cannot lull the suspicions of these men. Your carefully-worded speech will only frighten them; your intrigues will only serve to unite them; even your faithful followers will begin to fall away, for men do not follow unless they are led.’

‘But they must be led prudently.’

‘*Fortes fortuna adjuvat*—God helps those who dare.’

As he spoke, the ascetic face of the young Jacobin, who had led the troops of the Republic against the Austrian lines at Weissenbourg, and cowed the city of Strasbourg with his imperial mandates, glowed with prophetic fire. He rose to his height, and looked like one who could stand against the world.

Robespierre lifted his cup of coffee to his lips and shrugged his shoulders. When out-argued he fell back upon a pontifical silence.

There was a pause, suddenly broken by the voice of the little paralytic, Couthon.

‘For myself,’ he said, suddenly, his face drawing itself up into a curious acid smile, strangely distasteful to the observer, ‘I do not quite understand your point of view. Those fellows whom you are abusing so strongly are only doing our work in a rough way. Why all this disapproval? The great

point is that they stand in our way. If that is so, let us get rid of them. But why cant about it?’

As he ended, the acid smile, charged with a certain touch of inhumanity, and suggestive of unknown depths of human cruelty, repeated itself, and seemed to cast a chill over both his comrades.

Couthon’s candour had a curious effect on Robespierre.

It seemed to shake his nature to the very base. His face paled, and, pushing aside his coffee, he rose from his seat, livid with anger.

‘You lie, Couthon,’ he cried, ‘a thousand times, you lie! What we shall do will be justice!’

‘Well, then, call it justice,’ croaked Couthon; ‘we will not quarrel over names.’

Robespierre turned on him.

‘Couthon,’ he hissed, ‘I may not want you always.’

‘Nor I you,’ snapped back Couthon.

‘My blade is sharper than yours.’

‘Mine has a double edge.’

They seemed about to strike one another, as they leant across the little table, their faces distorted with anger.

But St Just intervened.

‘Peace, peace,’ he cried, sternly, to Couthon; ‘put up your sting,’—and to Robespierre,—‘Mind him not, he is but in one of his moods; he will

recover—' and finally to both,—'Friends, let us not quarrel—we who stand alone to form a true new state, a model to the world.'

Thus urged, the two ceased, and, with a reaction as rapid as the fit of anger itself, shook hands and made their peace.

And then once more St Just urged his policy of action—passionately and earnestly. The other two listened. Now and again, as Robespierre caught the light in his friend's eyes and saw the look on his face, he almost yielded. With such backing he could stand against the world! But then his prudence would return to him. With fatal clearness he would look beyond his friend to the mass of the indolent, the cowardly, and the empty-headed that made up the ruck of his following. And then his caution would seem to hold him back with iron hand. For St Just's counsels would, it seemed to him, leave him like a general without an army—carry St Just and himself into the breach to be massacred alone. And when he contemplated that possibility, his nerve failed him.

'No,' he said at last, wearily, 'it cannot be. The danger is too great.'

'The alternative is death.'

'Not if we impress them—warn them—call them to account. They will rally to us.'

'By frightening all, you will make enemies of all.'

St Just rose. Even he was wearied with the debate.

'Then you will not do it? You will not pick out your foes and strike them—you will not win the vultures over by giving them carrion?'

Robespierre shook his head.

'Then, Robespierre,' said St Just, 'I have but one more thing to say.'

'What is that?'

St Just took his hand—sadly.

'Why, this—when you journey, whither you will journey I will go with you.'

Robespierre looked surprised.

'I am going nowhere.'

'Yes—nowhere—you have said it,' echoed St Just, gloomily. 'And now,' he said, changing his tone, 'let us come and make up this speech—this speech,' he added, muttering to himself, 'which is to warn and not to terrify—this breakwater for the deluge—this rosewater for the plague.'

And with a hasty farewell to the paralytic the two passed out.

Couthon, left behind to rest from the fatigue of the interview, lay down on a horsehair couch at the side of the room and closed his eyes with weariness. His physical ailment—both his legs were half-paralysed—made him feel the intense stress of this crisis far more severely than his friends. It was only because his incapacity gave

him an excuse for shirking so large a part of the work that he was able to survive at all. But now he was very sick and tired—corroded with the acid of the Revolution.

For one moment slumber overcame him, and he lay still. Five minutes after he awoke shrieking. The cerebral action, left for one moment to itself, had had its revenge, and he had dreamt that he saw facing him, with dreadful lack-lustre eyes, pale and cold in death, and with great drops of blood falling from the severed neck—his own head!

And there came over him that dread of the self-surrender of sleep which is one of the phenomena of insomnia—a fear of the thing which alone can cure it.

CHAPTER XXVI

A LULL

NEXT day was one of the hottest of a very hot Parisian summer. It was still early in the morning—about nine o'clock—when Robespierre thrust his work aside with a weary sigh. Turning to his faithful secretary Simon, he said, somewhat sharply,—‘I shall do no more work this morning.’

Simon had scarcely recovered from his surprise when Robespierre arose, and hastily changing his coat for one of lighter texture, hurried downstairs.

Entering the breakfast-room, he found Elise in a light and airy morning costume, deep in her favourite occupation of arranging flowers. As she saw him enter she flushed. She was so accustomed to his being engaged with work all the morning, that she had come to regard these hours as her own, and almost looked on his presence as an intrusion.

Robespierre was not afflicted with very clear vision, and he put down the flush to pleasure at his own entrance. He went up to her and took her hand.

‘My love,’ he said, ‘let us not waste this beautiful morning, the gift of the Supreme Being. Let us rejoice in the joy of Nature; let us throw aside the artificial restraints of town life, and go far out into the country, where we may wander at our will.’

Though not caring over much for the company, Elise was not sorry to escape from stuffy Paris into the pretty suburb of Clichy. Robespierre was in a generous mood, and they drove beyond the gates in quite a sumptuous carriage. There they descended, and wandered for several hours through the pretty woods interspersed with villas that then covered that side of Paris.

Robespierre looked like a man just recovering from a heavy illness. His cheeks had taken their old sallow hue, his eyes were slightly bloodshot, and his hand shook.

And no wonder, for the crisis was hard on his heels. Paris was full of rumours, terrifying all those who might have rallied to him, rumours of catacombs emptied to receive the coming holocaust, of new guillotines and fresh, swifter modes of butchery. St Just’s prophecy had been only too well verified—the seeds of indefinite threats had sprung up armed men.

Little did the gossips know the truth. He who figured as an implacable butcher in their random tales was really paralysed by one of those nerve-failures which sometimes seize men in seasons of greatest crisis after long periods of strain. He could not bring himself to take action. He could not, somehow, see clearly into the situation. Conscious that his hesitation was partly physical, he had been training himself to greater steadiness of hand by pistol practice and by daily rides, with little success. A sudden world-weariness had taken the power from his hand, and he was walking impotent to his doom. Elise noticed that he walked slowly, as if lame, and that his eyes had a terrible intensity, as of perpetual fear.

They walked for some time in silence through the woods, both absorbed in their own thoughts. She was wondering why, at such a moment, he had come on this errand. He well knew, and was watching his opportunity for saying the thing in his mind.

Suddenly a waft of cool, refreshing air shook the heavy foliaged trees, gratefully tempering the still and oppressive heat of the midsummer day.

It seemed to break the spell. Robespierre was the first to speak.

‘Elise,’ he said, ‘to-morrow I shall want your help.’

She said nothing, but waited for what should follow. Her eyes, perhaps, looked a question.

‘Because to-morrow,’ he went on, ‘is the crisis of my fortunes. I have to meet my enemies, and either to defeat them or to be vanquished myself. Thou wilt come with me, wilt thou not, and give me thy support?’

The girl was still silent.

‘Ah,’ he cried, ‘I can see that I have not yet earned your love! And yet this is the most bitter woe of all—for with that I could die willingly, but now I shall go down knowing that thou wilt become another’s!’

‘You ask too much,’ said Elise at last, in a low voice. ‘Have I not faithfully carried out my pledge? Have I not acknowledged you in private and in public as my betrothed? What more can you want? You cannot force an affection that I do not feel!’

‘Force!’ he cried; ‘you know that force has been the furthest from my thoughts! Have I not determined to win thee willingly, or not at all?’

She slightly quickened her pace.

‘If so, if force is to have no part,’ she said, slowly, ‘then let me free.’

‘But you have given me your promise.’

He had gone too far. She turned on him with flashing eyes.

‘Was it not by force that you gained it?’

Robespierre was checked. He almost whined his reply.

‘Ah, yes, Elise, you are right. I fell, I sinned deeply, I imprisoned an innocent man. It is the one blot on my life. But you—you ought to forgive, if anyone, for it was from love of you that I did it.’

‘Perhaps—what you did to me,’ she said, ‘but what you did to *him*—never.’

‘Have I not sufficiently expiated? Has he not tortured me night and day ever since, and have I not shown him a scrupulous mercy I have shown to none else?’

He quickened his pace as he went on.

‘Have I not protected him from his enemies? Have I not defended him on the Committee of Public Safety, and sheltered him in the Convention? If I have brought him near to death once, I have since saved him from death a hundred times! And yet,’ Robespierre went on, ‘he seeks to destroy me. Though he knows that I am bound not to touch a hair of his head, he works ceaselessly night and day to bring me to the ground. There is no defence for me; I can do nothing; for if I punish him I lose *you*.’

Elise was silent, but a dreadful horror began to take shape in her mind. She knew that Robespierre’s love for her was strong and obstinate, and that he would not easily imperil it; but men

in face of death will do desperate things. What if he broke his promise now? A word from him, and Louvier's fate would be sealed. Would he give that word? She seemed to read a threat in his speech.

And what was the alternative? If he did not slay Louvier, what was the only other outcome possible? Why—that Louvier must slay him. And she shrank from that issue with the sensitive distaste of a delicate soul. She seemed to see in it a taint of murder.

Robespierre had not failed to detect the conflict of feeling through which she was passing. He watched her closely, and after a pause spoke again, softly and persuasively.

'Ah! Elise,' he said, sighing, 'I know that you care for Citizen Louvier too much to see him suffer harm. And yet—what am I to do? You see my position.'

'You have pledged yourself,' she flashed out.

'Yes—a pledge is a pledge—but would you have me die like a rat in a trap?'

'What would you have me do?' she wailed, and her heart beat fast with the terror of it.

'See him—speak to him—persuade him to peace.'

'You overrate my power.'

'Then he loves you not.'

'Not so—he loves me too well.'

‘And shows it by disobeying you?’

‘No—by doing more for me than I for myself.’

Robespierre relapsed into a vexed silence.

They had emerged from the clump of trees under which they had been walking into an open space of ground, in the distance before them shone the spires and steeples of Paris, while the dull roar of the great city, made musical by space, struck almost soothingly on the ear. Everything spoke of peace. From the right came the joyous laughter of a group of children playing in a cottage garden, while their father looked on, in a great blue blouse and smoking a long pipe. On so great an expanse as that spread out before them it seemed as if the revolutions of man could make no change or impression.

Even Robespierre's soul was not untouched by the sense of the eternal issues, as the faction fights of Paris seemed to fade away in the dim distance, and all the foreground was filled with the calm, changeless, smiling face of indifferent Nature.

He stopped in his walk, and stood gazing at distant Paris. A deep melancholy seemed to pass over his face—a melancholy such as might be created by a sense of irretrievable divorce from all that was orderly and fair. Perhaps he scarcely realised in a way that could have found expression

in words the sense of all that lay between him and tranquillity—the sense of how much expiation would be required before he could make his peace with the order of things. But there flitted across his face a haunting regret, such as might be supposed to flit across the face of some lost soul whose agonies were varied by an occasional glimpse of Paradise.

Whatever it was, the feeling passed away very quickly, and as he resumed his walk, the look of calculating cunning began to come back. He began the attack from another quarter.

‘Ah,’ he said with a sigh, ‘how this scene brings home to one the uselessness and vanity of all our strifes!’

‘Yes,’ she said, coldly. She had little appetite for platitudes.

‘Ah!’ he went on, ‘and if only woman knew her power!’

‘How so?’ she said.

‘Why, to be a peacemaker between warring men. Don’t you remember that old tale of the Sabine women who stepped between the Romans and the Sabines? Why should you not do the same for us, and earn eternal fame?’

Unconsciously, and almost by chance, Robespierre had struck on a note which found an echo in the girl’s heart. She, too, far more sincerely than he, was deeply agonised by the strife that

was going on around her. Acutely sensitive to surrounding influences, she, too, felt the want of harmony between their life and the life of Nature—she, too, longed for peace. Anything to save her lover from the dread alternatives before him!

They walked on in silence for a time, and then at last she spoke.

‘It is well,’ she said, very simply. ‘I will go to Louvier.’

Robespierre was immediately all smiles. He left the subject. A weight seemed to be removed from his mind, and for a moment the heavy cloud of depression seemed to lift.

And so, as they walked home to Paris through the growing corn, he led the conversation into quite other paths, and for one short hour seemed to forget all his troubles, as his mind played freely over those dreams of political happiness and perfection in which he was certainly more at home than in the realities that surrounded him.

CHAPTER XXVII

A VAIN APPEAL

LATE that afternoon, Elise was ushered into Louvier's rooms. Jean had gone to the wars, and she was not sorry to enter without disclosing her errand to possibly garrulous lips. The new servant was accustomed to strange visitors.

'The citizen,' he said, 'is dressing for this afternoon's Convention, but he will doubtless see you, citizeness, before he goes out.'

And so he had led her into the room where Louvier had been arrested—the room which Louvier had loved to call his 'workroom,' crowded to her with memories of sympathies shared and the swift wedding of thought with thought.

She remained standing; for the purpose in her mind was too stern to allow a semblance of rest. She would require all her firmness to go through what was coming, without deviating from her straight path. It was better to meet him so.

But she could not cry 'Halt!' to her wandering eyes, and as she looked round, everything reminded her of the old, beloved days; the books, the pictures, and every trace of him that the room contained. For the moment all her calamities seemed to disappear, and she could only remember that she was once more near her lover.

In the midst of her reverie, the door suddenly opened, and Louvier appeared. The past vanished and the present resumed its sway, with all its burden of separation and divided purpose. For there stood before her one who seemed removed by a whole world of division from the Louvier of those early days—as far as is the eager fighter from the cultured idealist, willingly aloof from the stress of combat.

She noticed, with the quick perception of a woman, that he was more neatly dressed than of late. It was not unlikely that the very height of the present crisis had brought him back to that earlier habit, just as negligent men have been observed to dress carefully for the scaffold.

But in other respects how changed he was! For the last three days he had taken no sleep, and his weary face was marked with deep lines, that gave him the look of one prematurely aged. His eye seemed unnaturally bright; he would, from time to time, pass his hand over his brow, as if trying to remove some weight; in fine, the restless spirit

of political intrigue had marked him for its own.

Elise was standing slightly in the gloom between the windows, and he did not at first recognise her. He advanced courteously, but somewhat stiffly, with the manner of a man who has been stopped in his outgoing by an irksome but necessary duty.

‘Citizeness,’ he said, bowing, ‘I am at your service.’

And then, suddenly, as his eyes lifted, he caught sight of her face and uttered a cry. For one moment they stood facing one another in silence with hungry eyes. Her heart beat fast, and she did not dare to speak lest she should fail at the outset. All the stifled desire of months seemed to leap out in that moment and almost capture her will. She was obliged to let him speak first.

‘You here?’ he cried, hoarsely. ‘Am I awake or dreaming? No, it *is* you, escaped at last from that scoundrel—released from that paltry pledge. Ah! how I have longed for this.’

He pressed forward to embrace her. She shrank back.

‘This is madness,’ she whispered, her voice almost stifled with conflicting emotion.

‘Madness?’ he cried. ‘No, my love, it is sanity itself—the first touch of sanity in this mad dream. Come let me save you!’

'Nay,' she wailed, 'it is you I have come to save.'

'How so?' he cried.

'From yourself—by pleading for one we both have no cause to love.'

'For—?'

His eyes voiced the name.

She signed assent.

'You wish me to spare *him*?' he said, sternly.

'Yes,' she cried, 'to save thee from stain.'

'From no other reason?' he asked, bitterly.

'That is no lover's question,' she said, very low.

He paused, half ashamed.

'Yours is no lover's request. Why should I spare this man?'

'Because it is written, "Thou shalt not kill."'

'I kill to save others from death.'

'Ah, if that were so!' she sighed.

'It is so!' he cried. 'I kill him as I kill a snake or a tiger—I kill him because he is the pest of his time. I stamp him out thus,' and he brought his heel down heavily on the floor, 'and thus, and thus, and I feel no remorse.'

'No, I know better,' she said, very softly. 'You kill him to win me.'

'And what if I do?'

He spoke passionately.

'Then,' she said, 'you will fail.'

'How?'

'Because I will not be the reward of blood.'

The reply staggered him. His first feeling was one of anger at her unreasonableness, and blind vexation at the circumstances which had led to this misunderstanding by keeping them apart for so long. But this led him to a milder mood. After all, it was only necessary to explain. A solitary woman could not be expected to understand the exigencies of such a contest as this. The very sensitiveness which had caused this revolt made him love her the more.

'You have become morbid,' he said, pleadingly, 'because of much loneliness. I, too, have suffered so. But think, darling, has not this man been condemned to death by every sane and sober man? Has he not been tried at the bar of humanity, and has not judgment gone against him?'

She answered with relentless logic.

'Then why should *you* play the executioner?'

'Because I am not sure that, without me, judgment will be carried out.'

'Then you will be the instrument of his death—without you, he would live,' she whispered, with an awful intensity in her tones. And then she paused.

'What then?' he cried.

'Why, then—you will be his *murderer*!'

He drew back as if struck with a whip, as she uttered the word with the emphasis of horror.

‘Is that my reward?’ he cried. ‘Is that thy renewal of love?’

He walked passionately to and fro, while she, torn with the conflict of pity, and yet unmoved from her aim, stood silent with her eyes on the ground. Her silence provoked him. It seemed to him, in his irritable mood, to partake of indifference. It drove him to say the things which he had been keeping back with careful self-restraint.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I did expect an appeal for pity from this poltroon at the eleventh hour, when he once realised that we had caught him in the toils he had prepared for us. But through *you*!—you were the last person through whom I should have looked for it! Are you not bound to him, and do you not wish to be free?’

‘Yes,’ she said, very low. ‘God knows how I pray for it; but by fair means, not foul.’

‘Then by what means?’

‘By flight, if you will—anything rather than this.’

Louvier stopped still with a great joy. By flight? Had he not been awaiting this promise for weeks and months? Had he not writhed in the network of scruple which kept her from consenting? Yes, and it had come at last!

But in the act of speaking he paused.

Stay—he could not go until one thing was done. He could not leave his great enemy triumphant—

he could not leave France to slip back into his hands—he could not leave his work unfinished. It was impossible. All that mighty maze of scheming and intrigue now closing round his victim, built up through the tedious weeks—should that be all in vain?

No, he loved Elise still very dearly; but there was one thing he had grown in the long weeks to love more—his own hate. When he spoke, it was with a changed voice.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘my love, we will fly! Thank God for that word! In a few days, when my work is finished—’

‘No; now or not at all.’

He paled. His conflict of feeling was terrible to watch. Would hate win, or love?

‘No, *ma chérie*, not now. You can stay here. We can wed at the Hôtel de Ville, and then, in a few days—’

‘No; now or never.’

He still hesitated.

Elise turned away,

He had made his choice.

‘Good-bye,’ she said—and was gone.

CHAPTER XXVIII

‘LIKE LUCIFER’

‘PRESIDENT OF ASSASSINS, I demand speech of thee for the last time!’

Amid the din and babel of a thousand voices, expostulating, appealing, denouncing, raging—in a slight lull of sound—came these words, shrieked out at the top of a voice already breaking with the strain.

It was the cry of Robespierre against the Convention in revolt.

For the end had come. That morning—July 27th or the ninth of Thermidor—had been fixed by Robespierre for the last effort against the rebels. On the previous day, he had made an ominous speech, and St Just was to have followed it to-day with one of a more definite kind.

At nine o'clock, accordingly, every bench had been filled, every leader was present. There was

Tallien, busily running to and fro between the chamber and the lobby ; not far off was Boissy, sitting calmly among his followers ; and close to Robespierre himself was Carnot, sombre and silent. Over the whole Convention there was an ominous hush, as if everyone were waiting.

And then St Just had slowly mounted the tribune. He laid his speech on the desk before him and began.

He was not allowed to proceed far. Scarcely had he finished his opening sentences, when there began to arise a strange murmur of comment and interruption, like the wind among the trees when a storm is on the march. Unnerved by this, St Just looked up angrily from his paper, stopped, and turned to the President. But he showed no sign ; there was no help in that quarter.

And then Tallien had leapt to his feet. Immediately the interruption stopped, and with one consent there was a hush to hear him. St Just protested in vain.

Angrily and hysterically, Tallien poured out his pent-up hatred of Robespierre.

‘If the Convention dare not strike the tyrant,’ he cried, ‘then I myself dare ; and with this I will do it if need be.’

So crying, he snatched a long dagger from his pocket, and brandished it in the air, wildly gesticulating.

It was as a spark to the powder. Immediately the whole Convention caught fire, shouting, rising in their seats, yelling in confused discord.

The words 'Tyranny,' 'Triumvirate,' 'Dictatorship,' arose frequently above the uproar.

Meanwhile, St Just simply stood on, waiting in the tribune with folded arms, pursed lips, and immovable features.

Not so Robespierre. Excited to the highest pitch at the first sounds of the revolt, he could not remain in his place. Ignoring all rules, he rushed across the floor and mounted the tribune steps. Standing beside St Just, he tried to make himself heard.

But it was impossible. From the hall itself there now arose a vast volume of sound, invincible, supreme. And the President redoubled the jingling of his bell—in itself alone enough to drown a human voice.

All that could be heard from Robespierre in this last hour were a few scattered sentences emerging from the chaos of such a tumult, and recorded by those who watched the scene from above.

With one final effort he turned from the Mountain to the Plain and appealed shriekingly to the body of men who sat behind Boissy.

'To you, good men of the Plain,' he cried, 'I appeal to you.' For perhaps he still hoped that they, however deeply they might hate him, would

hate Tallien more. But Boissy had explained things to them, and they sat silent and unresponsive.

A few minutes afterwards, there was another lull, and Robespierre opened his mouth to speak once more. But no sound came. Noise had conquered, and his voice was gone.

Stupefied and exhausted, the beaten man turned, dumbly pleading, first to one side and then to another. But each time a yell greeted him.

'The blood of Danton chokes him,' they cried. He made a step forward. 'Not there,' they cried, 'Vergniaud sat there.' Appalled by the shout, he swerved towards another seat. 'Away,' they cried, 'Danton sat there.' He fell back and leant against the tribune, his lips blue and spotted with froth.

Then began a new cry. It was started, no one knew by whom, and it spread rapidly, and soon the whole Convention was yelling it together as if with one voice. And that cry was 'Accusation—Decree of Accusation.'

The President was quick to take the hint. Rising, and for the first time enforcing order, he swiftly put the Decree. Nearly the whole Convention rose to support it, and to condemn Robespierre.

But not Robespierre alone.

'I demand to share my brother's fate,' cried Augustin. The demand was granted. These two were followed by Couthon, St Just and Lebas.

The ushers, half frightened at their charge, removed them tremblingly to a neighbouring committee room.

On all this dreadful scene of passion and frenzy, Elise had looked down from the gallery, whither Robespierre had taken her to witness his triumph. And foremost in the crowd below, hoarse with mad shouting, and half-rabid with hatred and ferocity, she had seen the man who loved her.

But as the east is from the west, so far is the spirit of hatred from the spirit of love.

CHAPTER XXIX

A FATED PARTING

IT was four o'clock in the afternoon of the following day, when Elise Duplay might have been seen walking distractedly to and fro in the study of the great house at the corner of the Rue Delphine. Every now and again, she would go to the windows and look out with horror-stricken eyes, or stop in her walk to listen. For what was that dull murmur, as of a myriad tongues, which came from the streets below? She paused once more in her walk and looked out on the street.

It was filled with a hurrying crowd of excited, gaily-dressed Parisians, talking rapidly as they went, and revelling in a freedom to which they seemed unaccustomed—as if under the immediate joy of a relief from some great repressive force. The very children seemed to share in their parents' joy, as they laughed and danced by their sides.

And all that crowd was making in one direction—towards the Place de la Révolution.

The girl was about to turn away from the window, when above the murmur of voices there arose a more tumultuous sound—an increasing roar, as of an army of tigers thirsting for their prey. People in the street below ceased to stream forward, and, hearing the sudden tumult approaching, turned round with quick, eager gaze, expectant for what was to come. Unconsciously, as is the way with crowds, they fell back to the side of the road, thus making a lane as if for something to pass. And while this was happening, the girl stood looking on, fascinated against her will.

The sound came nearer—now clearly a human uproar, but such an uproar as is caused when men are least to be distinguished from beasts. A medley of triumphant yells, and shrieks of mere bloodthirsty inebriety, such as would arise from a party of feasting cannibals.

Elise stood rooted to the spot.

And then, to those who gazed from above, that part of the crowd which stood at the corner seemed to be moved like some calm stream when it is reinforced by a turbid, riotous torrent from the mountains that feed it.

On, on, it came—a rushing crowd, moving swiftly and joyously, with every possible extravagant demonstration of Bacchanalian joy.

It was broken in the centre by some object, round which the units of the crowd seemed to group, like flies flocking to a piece of meat.

The object came nearer, and, as it approached, it was possible for Elise, looking down from above, to see what it was.

It was a bare cart; and in it, packed among others, lay—Robespierre.

There he lay in utter collapse—his chin, smashed by a pistol-shot, bound up with a dirty cloth; his eyes closed, as if in death. And round him the mob cursed and yelled.

The tumbril passed beneath the window.

Suddenly Robespierre's eyes opened, and he looked up to the windows of the house where he had lived. Elise never forgot that look. It was the look of a lost soul.

The tumbril passed, and the howling crowd closed up behind it. Shouts of joy came from every throat, and the street was one sea of waving hats and handkerchiefs. From every window were thrust faces, either lit up with joy or distorted with triumphant hatred.

And then the street began to swim before the girl's eyes. All around her things grew dimmer, dimmer, until the world was suddenly blotted out.

When she returned to consciousness, Elise found herself lying on a sofa in the same room. The

first thing she realised was that her hands were being chafed and her forehead smoothed. The cloud that hung over her senses cleared, and she recognised, kneeling at her feet, Bertrand Louvier.

She tried to spring to her feet, but found herself too weak. She fell back and burst into a flood of tears.

‘Why are you here?’ she cried. ‘Why are you here? Do you not understand? Do you not understand?’

He rose to his feet, pale and collected.

‘I came,’ he said, ‘because you are in danger.’

‘In danger?’

‘Yes; the crowd are in a mood to commit any atrocity. They are drunk with blood. They may attack this house. You must come with me.’

‘Impossible,’ she cried, and hid her face from him.

He made a gesture of impatience.

‘Elise,’ he said, ‘I came to ask no favour, to make no claim. I ask for no pity from you. I recognise my defeat and accept it. But that,’ he went on, ‘is of little moment at the present time. What is my defeat to me when your life is in peril? I love you still,’ he ended, softly, ‘and I claim the right to be your rescuer.’

‘Leave me here,’ she cried. ‘What have I to live for? Let them come and kill me if they will.’

Louvier walked to the window and looked

anxiously down the street. He noticed several men pointing to the house, and a gracefully-dressed citizen in passing flung up a gibe. They had still time, though he knew by secret information that the house would be attacked before sunset.

At last he turned from the window, and crossing the room, once more stood by her side, gazing down with deep, pitiful eyes on the woman whom he still loved more than all the world. As for her, she seemed unconscious of his presence. Her agitation was only to be discovered by the quick breathing which shook her frame. For nearly a minute there was silence between them, a silence which Louvier seemed unwilling to break. At last, remembering the urgency and the peril, he spoke again.

‘Elise,’ he said, slowly and softly, ‘I do not even ask you to trust me, I only ask you to let me help you. I will not deny that I had once hope, but that dream I have put away from me. God is my witness that I have done my utmost to forget it. And now see,’ he said, speaking more hurriedly, as he bent down and took her hesitating hand, ‘see what wise plans I have made. Down below, in the side street, I have a carriage waiting for you with two of the best horses I can procure in Paris. On the box is a trustworthy servant of mine, known as an extreme Republican, and certain to avert all suspicion. In my pocket are

two passports, which I have secured this day from the Committee of Public Safety, and which will enable you to travel without let or hindrance in France and across the border into Switzerland. In another pocket I have a letter of introduction, which will secure you hospitality when you arrive on the banks of the Lake of Geneva, at a convent famous for its kindness to the victims of this Revolution. Everything has been foreseen, and when you reach your destination you will be able to rest in peace.'

Had Louvier raged or stormed, had he denounced or defied her, she could have maintained her hard attitude of resistance, and have refused to accept a favour at his hand. But as she listened to his plans, and read in them the careful foresight and regard of a selfless love, his words insensibly softened her.

Besides, in her present mood, there was something irresistibly attractive about the life which he held out to her as the relief from her present stress. She felt that she wished, above all, to get somewhere far away from the world and think it all out—to get away from the storm to some haven of peace. What retreat could offer a prospect of serener calm than that of a convent by the banks of that mighty placid lake of which she had so often heard from the Swiss exiles who found a home in Paris?

She surrendered her vow of silence.

‘But,’ she said, ‘they will recognise me. I shall be seen driving through Paris. I am not unknown,’ she added, with the faintest touch of pride.

‘That can easily be avoided,’ he said ; ‘I have a disguise ready for you.’

‘But,’ she said again, and hesitated, ‘you know the Parisians—I cannot go alone through Paris—I shall be insulted.’

‘No,’ he said, ‘I foresaw that. I shall go with you.’

‘That will be worse,’ she cried.

By this time she had half raised herself, and was resting her face on her left hand. He dropped on one knee, and, seizing her right hand, spoke hurriedly and passionately.

‘There is only one way out of it,’ he said ; ‘you must give me one last favour. I have thought this matter out all day, and I see you can only escape from Paris on one condition, and that is, that for this day alone, you travel with me as—as—my betrothed.’

She shrank from him with a passionate gesture.

‘Impossible,’ she whispered. ‘I gave you the choice—’

‘I know,’ he said, wearily, ‘and I accept the consequence. But this is only for an hour—only to the gates of Paris. There I leave you freely to enjoy your life—without me. But the gates of

Paris you will never reach unless we do this. What more natural ?' he went on, rapidly. 'The guard comes to the door of the coach. He asks us gravely who we are. I show my passports. "I, Deputy Louvier, and my betrothed," I say, proudly. He is wreathed with smiles. "Pass on," he says, "Deputy Louvier and thy betrothed." The hearts of all are touched to the quick, and we move on safely to the barrier. Think, Elise,' he said, 'it is but a game. We shall be playing a part—and the reward for you is life and happiness—and, for me, to *know* that you have life and happiness.'

Elise was still thinking hard, leaning on her hand. He pleaded his cause well, and he had won over to his side that great fund of common sense which formed the foundation of her character. Her fear now was for herself and her own strength of will. Her scruples had not ceased to work. The thought of marrying Louvier now was still impossible to her—she loved him in such fashion that her love was merged in grief and utter distress. But still she knew that behind all this lurked a mighty passion which might sweep her into action against her better will. Could she trust herself to play this game, and not in the end turn it into seriousness ?

She felt a sudden contempt for herself. Her mind was fixed, and why should she change it ? Could she not trust him ? No, let them play the

game. This gentle mockery with Fate would be all the clearer proof that the reality was left behind.

Thus it was suddenly, and with a rapid air of decision, she said,—

‘Yes, I will come,’ and rose to her full height.

In a few moments they had both fallen into the same mood of common-sense activity, fighting against an immediate danger. They worked at the disguise with rapidity and business-like despatch. In ten minutes Louvier went down the stairs to the side entrance of the house with a citizeness whom none of her most intimate friends would have recognised. He himself carried a small valise, into which she had thrust a few travelling necessities.

The carriage which Louvier had secured was purposely of a simple build, as least likely to attract attention in its journey through the country districts. The coachman was dressed like an ordinary Republican citizen of the working class, and there was nothing to distinguish the whole outfit from that of an average Frenchman of the middle class—for these distinctions had really survived all shocks—starting out for his honeymoon in the Provinces.

Their experiences in crossing Paris were very much as Louvier had prophesied. During the last few weeks he had become known in Paris as one

of the most effective opponents of Robespierre in the Convention debates. This was now a source of popularity. When, therefore, the carriage was overhauled, as frequently happened, by a Republican patrol, his passports proved easily sufficient to avoid all inconvenient inquiries.

'Long life to you, Deputy Louvier,' was the general comment. 'Robespierre has fallen, and you have well deserved this happiness.'

But it would be difficult to describe the conflict of emotions through which the girl at his side passed during that hour.

As they drove across Paris, sitting side by side, her nature, naturally peaceful and amenable to the force of habit, utterly astray in the region of strife into which it had been called, fell back with a sort of serene satisfaction into the old groove of her life. The last four months, with all their conflict and stress of mind, seemed to be forgotten in the present moment. The whole interference of Robespierre seemed a kind of nightmare which had passed into oblivion. And here she was once more by the side of the man she loved, listening to his descriptions of her, as a plain matter-of-fact, as his betrothed, without a word of protest or reply. Could there be anything more perilous to her resolve?

Then, in the midst of her dreaming, her eye fell on Louvier's face. Ah! how changed it was; no

longer open and happy-hearted, but seared with the scars of conflict and intrigues, strained and intense with long brain effort, and powerful with a power from which she shrank! How far removed from peace and love! Ah, no, this was the dream, and that was the reality.

Suddenly the coach stopped. They had reached the limit of their journey. Louvier turned to her with a calm, sad face. He knew that the die was cast.

Neither of the two could afterwards say precisely what happened in the wild moment of parting. All they knew was that a veil seemed suddenly rent from between them, and the old intimacy of heart and mind, which had been broken by four months of separation, seemed to begin afresh as naturally as if it had never ended.

And yet no shadow of doubt ever passed over the mind of either as to where their duty lay. Both knew that they must part—that long months must pass before the stains of violence had been washed out, and before there could be place for a love like theirs in a world so utterly gone astray. Both knew that it was impossible for them, without a crime against their love itself, to pick the fruit yet.

And perhaps it was this common knowledge which gave them both courage and strength at this moment. Perhaps it was the profound con-

viction that she could trust Louvier all in all, and yet that he would expect no guerdon in return, which enabled Elise to tell him that it was for love itself, and love's sake, that they parted now.

But that passionate parting had to end, and, though it seemed an age, it was really only some few minutes after Louvier had put his hand to the door of the coach, that, standing on the southern road from Paris, he watched the coach turn round a distant bend in the road and disappear from sight.

CHAPTER XXX

TOUCHING ZERO

THE dawn of July 21st, 1795, had broken wan and cheerless over the Bay of Quiberon, near the town of Lorient, on the coast of Brittany. The sea was running in a long swell after recent storms, and encircling with a great belt of foaming surf the long stretches of sand which made up the greater part of that coast line. Just here some protection was afforded by a long spit of land which, jutting far out into the sea, acted as a breakwater to the great sandy bend forming the bay itself. Over the sea there hung a heavy mist, obscuring all things, but near to the shore the veil was rent asunder, as if to reveal the scene of disaster and confusion which was being enacted on the land itself.

The rattle of musketry and the roar of cannon mingled with the shrieks of human beings in extremity, as a great confused mob of defeated

and panic-stricken peasantry pressed wildly along the peninsula to its utmost point—and even into the sea itself. Men, women and children were flying indiscriminately from some relentless foe in the rear, and stretching out their hands for aid that never came. Every now and then a cannon shot would fall among them, bringing a wind of death and destruction, while the survivors pressed on over the warm bodies of the slain, mad with the fear of death. A short way out to sea lay a small flotilla of boats riding at anchor. In their despairing efforts to reach these many plunged into the sea and were miserably drowned.

From the regularity of the firing, a listener could tell that inland the battle was still proceeding, but as the din of the musketry explosions came nearer and nearer it was only too clear that it was rather a pursuit than a battle.

The peasantry who were flying from the dread of death by land, only to be faced with the prospect of death by sea, were raw levies from among the native Bretons whose villages were thickly scattered over that coast. They belonged to that type which was designated by the Republican troops under the collective name of 'Chouans'—the survivors of the exterminating wars of 1792 and 1793, still seizing every chance of carrying on a vain guerilla warfare against the hated foes of their religious and political life.

Such a chance had occurred, or seemed to occur, when the Marquis de Puisaye landed his army of emigrant nobles on that inhospitable shore on June 27th, 1795, disembarking them from a small fleet of English troopships which had been lent to him for the purpose by the English Government.

Then had begun a season of dilatory and divided counsels, of confused marching and counter-marching, and of vague enthusiasm undermined by despairing memories, while the simple confidence of the peasantry who flocked to their standard was frittered away by jealous and incompetent officers.

And now had come a sudden night attack and surprise—a maddened flight of half-trained levies—and for the nobler sort a brief, vain resistance, ending in humiliating surrender.

This was the fate which had overtaken the small body of emigrant nobles who had tried to stem the rout, and who now, deserted by their commander, and forced to surrender, were standing or sitting in despondent groups on the summit of the ground which sloped down to the sandy shore. They were enveloped in a slight mist, and could see nothing of the tragic confusions enacted on the shore below. But their ears were filled with the distant cries of death and the wail of helpless humanity.

Apart from the rest sat the Marquis de Saens,

in silent gloom. His uniform was rent and soiled, his eyes were haggard and bloodshot, and his face covered with blood and the grime of smoke. He looked a very different man from the cultured, indifferent aristocrat of a few months before.

At his side lay his broken sword. He had fought fiercely through the morning hours, and the surrender was against his judgment. He knew too well what fate France had in store for captured emigrants. And if immediate death was the only alternative, death in 'battle's glory' had no terrors for him. It was what he had sought in coming here.

As it was, there had been a bathos—an absence of dramatic quality—about the sudden hoisting of the white flag and the collapse of their resistance, and still more now in their compulsory and shameful inactivity. Overcome with shame, the young Marquis had thrown away the musket which he had caught up from a dead soldier, broken his sword, and turned from his humiliating surroundings to gaze back towards the last remote prospect of help—the English troopships in the bay.

They had been fighting for several hours, and it was now past seven o'clock. The sun was already high in the heavens, and as he gazed, the mist round them broke and cleared away, rolling back over the sea in great woolly masses,

as if loth to depart. The English ships were revealed, lying close inshore; their boats now actively engaged in bringing off from the shore the crowds of helpless peasants.

And then, as De Saens looked, a horrible thing took place.

There was a puff of smoke from one of the ships, followed, in a few seconds, by a strange rushing sound behind him. Looking round, he saw several of his friends lying dead, or in their death agonies.

They were being fired on by their own friends. The English ships had mistaken them for 'Reds.'

Then ensued a scene of unsurpassable horror. Brave men who would have willingly faced the fiercest fire of an enemy paled before such a fate as this. Hemmed in from behind by a merciless foe—a battery of guns, loaded with grapeshot, stood in the way of flight—they only increased their own casualties by the crowding that resulted from any effort to escape. Grizzled veterans fell on their knees and begged for mercy. Brave youths ran shrieking from the zone of fire.

De Saens was perhaps the only man who remained unmoved. This fate, on the field of battle, would be better than to be shot in cold blood afterwards. His only regret was that while death came to many around him it ever shunned him.

But he was shaken out of his indifference. Throughout the battle he had acted as protector and guide to an aged nobleman who had followed him into the war—one of those provincial nobles whose righteousness had not proved sufficient to stave off judgment from France. Tired of a tedious exile, he had joined this expedition in despair.

When the English fire opened, De Saens's first thought was for him, and he attempted to protect him along with others behind a slight rise in the ground.

But his efforts proved vain. Suddenly a ricocheting shot fell in the midst of the group, cutting the old man in half, and killing several of his neighbours, but leaving De Saens unscathed. Spattered with the blood and brains of his old friend, he fell back in profoundest horror and disgust.

At that moment a horseman rode up in hot haste, and spoke a few hurried words to the officer of the Republican troops in guard over the prisoners. The officer smiled, but immediately turned towards the emigrants and sought out their commander—young De Sombreuil, the son of the Governor of the Invalides. A hurried conference took place between them, and then the young emigrant commander turned to one of his downcast aides-de-camp and gave him an order.

Obedient even in disaster, the aide-de-camp crossed to where De Saens stood. His message was brief. De Saens was wanted. The General, he said, had need of a desperate man.

'Then he is fortunate in his choice,' replied De Saens, laconically.

As he came nearer to the young revolutionary officer, sharing with perfect nonchalance the fire to which the emigrants were exposed, De Saens started, for in spite of many changes he could recognise in him his old friend of the days before the Revolution.

For it was none other than Bertrand Louvier.

They looked at one another for one moment with a calm glance of recognition. Then Louvier came forward and shook his hand.

'We have met,' he said, very simply and significantly.

De Saens smiled and returned the grasp, and then he saluted his commanding officer. De Sombreuil hesitated a moment, surprised at the incident, and then spoke hurriedly.

'You are a brave man, Marquis, and an expert swimmer. General Hoche has sent this messenger offering us one chance of life. He asks me to send a volunteer out to the English ships to inform them of our danger. He offers parole. It is a forlorn hope. Will you go?'

Never had a proposal of heroism hit upon a happier mood in a man's life. The offer seemed to come on De Saens with an exquisite relief from the agony of inaction. It opened an outlet for all the impotent yearnings and anguished despair of the moment. He answered without a moment's hesitation,—

‘General, I will go.’

Louvier had been watching him intently. Suddenly he spoke.

‘Friend, I come with you.’

De Saens imagined for the moment that Louvier was only acting under orders, and merely bowed assent. But then there came back to him the memory of their old friendship, and, with it, the recollection of that scene at the Arras cross roads, in the distant days of the eighties, when his humour had turned prophetic, and, more than his philosophy, had helped him to look into the coming time. He remembered the impression left upon him by Louvier's simple, unsullied optimism, and his passion for humanity. Since, he had judged him harshly: but now, after many days, they had met again, and once more the old understanding came back. All this flashed through his mind in a few seconds, and then they turned and ran together down towards the shore, with such speed as marks the steps of fine-spirited men when punctuated by the death of their fellows.

CHAPTER XXXI

A MEETING

As De Saens led on by an out-of-the-way footpath away from the crowd of panic-stricken Chouans—threading his way in and out between the sand hills that divided grass land from beach on that sterile and uninviting coast—there was little breath for speech, and the first friendly feeling between the two gave way to a sense of alienation.

Never, indeed, could outward circumstances have divided men more. Five years of revolution lay, so to speak, between them. They were fighting against one another in an internecine war—one a Republican, and the other an exiled emigrant.

But there were forces that drew them together. Both had suffered—both had been disillusioned—both had learned tolerance in the sore school of experience. Above all, both had loved and helped the same friend; and they were drawn nearer by the sad story which Louvier had to tell.

For on the day after his parting from Elise Louvier had stood by the death-bed of the Abbé Lemaître. Ever since his maltreatment in the streets of Paris the old man had sunk gradually, and now he was dying—dying of a broken heart. Like his master, he forgave his enemies—‘for they know not what they do’—and with his last breath he sent a message of thanks to De Saens.

De Saens was deeply moved. The common sorrow inevitably drew them together.

There were other things that Louvier did not tell his companion. He did not describe the tragedy of his great separation; the weariness of political life that came on him after Lemaître’s death; or how, tired of faction fighting, he had left the Convention and sought a new interest in the ranks of the Republican army.

These things he kept back from an instinctive reticence; but, indeed, time would not have sufficed. In passing among the sand hills they had been obliged to slow their pace to a walk, and it was then that Louvier gave Lemaître’s message. He had scarcely finished when they emerged on the shore. They found themselves close to a piece of low rock, running out far into the sea—almost the only rock on that sandy shore. Here the coast was protected, and only a long swell told of recent storms. They scrambled rapidly along the rock, in spite of the slippery sea-weed, and then found them-

selves beyond the surf, through which swimming would have been very difficult, if not absolutely impossible. It was 'a clear dive of some three or four feet from where they were standing into the great blue, gently-heaving sea.

The sea had fallen much since the early morning, but the wind was still blowing stiffly, and they were almost breathless after their long scramble when they came to the end and looked out towards the sea.

The English ships had come very close in shore, and as they watched the great vessels rising and falling they seemed within easy reach. But they both knew that the distance was over half a mile. The guns were still being worked intermittently, and every now and then a puff of smoke would come from one of the ships, to be followed by a long screech overhead.

'There is no time to be lost,' said De Saens, beginning to undress, 'the tide is running for me now, but in a quarter of an hour it will have turned.'

It was true.

And then, in that hour of stress and peril, when these two men stood face to face with death, their human nature showed itself capable of that divine quality which has convinced it of immortality. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.'

It is the link between the human and the divine.

Louvier's offer—to take De Saens's place in the water, while he wore his Republican uniform and made all speed to escape by land—was urged with the passionate vehemence of one who had long courted Death and cared not when he met him.

But in this wooing he had found a rival in De Saens. Louvier did not gain his point, but the offer broke down the reserve between them, and cemented a friendship which was to lend a brighter colour to the remainder of their two lives.

A few moments afterwards De Saens was breasting the sea and making his way with strong, steady strokes towards the ships. It was easy to say that he wished to die; it was more difficult to carry out the wish. Whatever he might desire, the life in him fought against death, and he could not deny it. He breasted the waves with ease and delight, and he drew nearer and nearer to the ships. At last he came within a hundred yards of one of the biggest, and the only danger that remained was the fear lest they should fire on him. He found himself eagerly preparing to dive out of reach of the shot if they should turn their guns on him.

But he had no need to do so. On the contrary, when they saw him swimming near, the English

in the nearest ship—fortunately the flag-ship of the fleet—biassed by no passionate preference for either side, and touched by no battle frenzy, lowered a boat. Drawing him out of the water, they brought De Saens on board, exhausted and chilled to the bone, but perfectly conscious and alive.

In a few moments he had given his message, and without delay the ‘Cease fire’ was signalled from ship to ship. The last cannon boomed, the dreadful massacre of friend by friend at last came to an end.

But no persuasion on the part of the English commodore could keep De Saens quiet in the berth where he rested for a short time, wrapped in blankets. He soon began to prepare for the return journey, and though the commodore and his officers were in a state of amazement and expostulation, nothing that they could say could shake him from his determination.

‘I am on parole,’ he proudly repeated.

‘On parole?’ cried the commodore, ‘On parole to those d——d rebels! What does that matter? Are they not traitors all?’

‘They are Frenchmen, monsieur,’ was all that the Marquis would reply; and finally, tired out with argument, they were fain to be content with his consent to be provided with a suit of clothes and rowed back to the shore.

As De Saens sat in a state of weary torpor in the stern of the smart man-o'-war's boat, listening to the steady thud of the oars in the rowlocks, he had time to look round and sum up the position. The morning mist had quite cleared away, and the sun was asserting its power. Out to sea a deep shadow lay on the water where, away in the distance, a thick squall descended and broke in fury. But, close to the darkest point of this square mile of wine-dark ocean, the rays of the sun fell in radiant glory in one long lane of brilliant emerald—a dazzling contrast, like brightest hope near to darkest despair.

The long line of light reached to the English ships and caught on the sails of the frigates, as they slowly and cautiously crept nearer to the long low spit of land which stretched out beyond the bay of Quiberon. To De Saens's fancy, they seemed like messengers of hope.

That spit of land was dark with masses of people, crowding to the water's edge—some of them even into the water. Boats were plying rapidly between the ships and the land, fetching off as many as possible of the unhappy Chouans, with their wives and children. But the means of conveyance were miserably inadequate, and some of the boats were sunk by the crowds who rushed in. The Republicans had no desire to be encumbered with hosts of peasant prisoners, and

were well satisfied to see the English ships filled up with this sorry merchandise. They did very little, therefore, to hinder or embarrass the embarkation, except for an occasional plunging shot from a battery behind the port, which reminded the crowd of their hated enemies, and drove them into fresh paroxysms of frenzied fear.

It was an ugly sight, even at this distance, and the Marquis turned away his eyes in sickened pity and horror. But he could not shut his ears to the long wail of human suffering which rose in one unceasing murmur from the whole stretch of coast. As he listened to it, his mind went back to the huddled, miserable figure of the unhappy De Puisaye, as he had seen him sitting in a corner of the English flag-ship, contemplating the work of his hands with a look of unutterable woe. Truly 'to be weak is miserable.'

But as the boat came nearer to the shore, De Saens began to look closely for his friend. Foreseeing that the tide would rise too far in his absence to allow Louvier to remain on the jut of rock whence he had plunged into the sea, De Saens had arranged a rendezvous on the shore not far away.

He was not desirous that the English boat's crew should come into contact with a Republican officer, and had accordingly managed to have the

boat steered to land at a spot a few hundred yards further north.

He rose before the boat reached land, and courteously thanked the British sailors. Before she had touched, he leapt into a foot of water and waded ashore, impatient to return.

The boat rowed away, and he walked along the shore shouting to Louvier. He ought now to be in sight, but De Saens noticed, with a chill at his heart, that he was nowhere visible along the shore. He mounted a small sand hill and scanned the coast more closely. He could see nothing. No—yes—what was the dark object on the ground not thirty yards away? His heart stood still.

Walking moodily to and fro on the shore Louvier had been hit by a spent ball from some neighbouring skirmish—hit in the lungs. He was quite unconscious, and lying in helpless confusion—doubled up, like a dead man. Seeing him thus De Saens at first augured the worst, but he was relieved to find the heart still faintly beating.

This relief soon gave way to puzzled wonder—what was he to do, thus alone with a wounded man on this shore?

He mounted a higher sand hill, and looked around once more to see whether there was any house or other refuge in sight.

About a mile away he could see the dark masses of the Republican troops moving inland

with their crowd of prisoners, and he realised for the first time that they were probably forgotten. What this meant for him flashed in on him in a moment. Yonder was no hope. He would be shot with the others—an Emigrant had no place for pity in the heart of a Revolutionist. But here, hidden from human ken, what might they not do? Why should not he and Louvier, two human beings cast together amid the wreck of things, slip out of memory and enjoy a pause to retrieve their fortunes, instead of ignobly perishing for causes in which they no longer believed?

At that moment, as he glanced around, his eye lit upon a small cottage not far away from where he stood. It was, in point of fact, a hut, which had been used by a number of young emigrant officers up to the moment when, in the darkness of that early morning, they had been roused by the Republican attack.

De Saens saw in a minute that his one chance was to get Louvier there. The hut lay at a distance of about a hundred yards, and it would be difficult to imagine anything more painfully laborious than the journey which he then took, carrying Louvier short distances in his arms, moving from point to point with infinite care and caution, and with constant panics lest the last remnant of life should have ebbed from his

still unconscious friend. But at last they reached the hut.

It was a small dwelling of some forty feet square, and bearing every trace of recent habitation and sudden desertion. A dead soldier lay not far from the door, slain by a stray bullet. The furniture was in confused disarray, the bedding was tossed hither and thither on the beds, and the rooms were full of scattered papers and maps, lying for the most part on the floor.

But De Saens paid small heed to this. He was overjoyed to find any bedding at all, and, slowly lifting his friend over the threshold, laid him tenderly on one of the beds.

Then, with the skilful hand of an old campaigner, he laid bare the wound, bathed it, and fashioned a bandage out of the torn fragments of one of the sheets.

In a short space of time his patient was comfortably lying in a pleasant, warm bed, with his wound well bandaged and bathed, and a bright fire sending forth its genial warmth from the fireplace.

There for many weeks, far from the noise and stir of the world—long after the Republican troops had marched away, and the remnants of the peasantry had returned to their homes—De Saens nursed his friend back into uncertain life. They were helped by the peasant women who cautiously crept back to the hut, and, after the first surprise

at their visitants, came to his aid with all that ready innate skill and tact which the roughest woman knows how to employ in dealing with a sick man.

And when two months had passed, and the sick man was convalescent, they easily exchanged their uniforms for peasants' costumes, and set out on a long journey across country to Paris, the only city in France where they could be sure of a hiding-place.

And there, after a journey of infinite weariness, they arrived in September 1795, to hear that every emigrant captured at Quiberon had been shot a few days after the battle.

CHAPTER XXXII

TWILIGHT

THE shades of dusk were falling over the Lake of Geneva on a day in the middle of September 1785. White and red sails were scattered over the great darkening expanse of waters, and the bright emerald of the day had turned to darkest violet. And yet the sun had set but a few minutes over the lake, and the autumn air was warm enough for a group of nuns and novices to be still lingering in the gardens of an old French convent close to the Castle of Chillon. The gardens stood at a great height, and from them could be seen nearly the whole expanse of water, until it was lost to sight in the direction of Geneva. But it was not in that direction that the eyes of most were turned at this moment. They were fixed on the glorious pageant which was being unfolded in stately pomp on the eastern side of the lake.

There the great crown of the snow mountains,

caught by the rays of the dying sun, blazed with every jewel of colour, growing in strength from the moment that the sun was lost to the valleys, like the gradual *crescendo* of some stately symphony. At first there was the palest touch of crimson on the faint and bashful snow, growing by slow stages to a brilliant red, which deepened in its turn to a burning copper, that glowed like a furnace of fire. This highest point of beauty seemed to linger reluctantly for a few brief moments, and then the glow suddenly died away as rapidly as it had come—until the mountains glimmered white through the deepening dusk, like Titans weary of a frolic.

A great many of the nuns and novices, who half-filled the garden, tired out with the tasks of the day, and long accustomed to these Alpine glories, looked at the scene with the indifference of use and wont. Some were too busily employed in conversation to look at all—snatching avariciously at the few minutes of talk allowed to them in their austere day.

But apart from the rest stood two, whose admiration did not seem to have been entirely chilled by the freezing force of custom. One of them was easily distinguishable as the Mother Superior of the convent—an elderly woman, with an air of quiet dignity, wise and kindly, unwarped by her somewhat narrowing life, and with warm human affection writ clear on her open face. She had passed her

arm, with a gentle air of patronage, round the waist of the young girl who was standing at her side.

The tragedies through which she had passed—the death of Robespierre and the flight from Paris—had changed without marring the beautiful face of Elise Duplay. She had, indeed, lost much of the grace that is inevitably bound up with innocence and gaiety of an uncaptured heart, but in its place had come the scarcely less attractive charm that is born of sorrow and guiltless suffering. The great painter Life seemed to have used the childish beauty of her former face as a sketch on which he had painted a thousand of his deeper emotions. ‘Those whom the gods love,’ ran the ancient proverb, ‘die young’; rather should we moderns say that they live and suffer.

She was gazing at the sunset with an almost ecstatic concentration of vision.

‘How beautiful!’ she sighed. ‘I have never before seen anything like it.’

‘Yes, dear,’ replied the elder woman, ‘it is like the opening of a gate in heaven. We seem to catch a glimpse through, even with these feeble eyes of ours. But the vision is soon taken from us.’

There was silence between them for a few moments, and then a slight breath of colder air came up from the lake.

‘It is growing chilly,’ said the elder woman, ‘and

the evenings are not so safe as a month ago. Let us go in.

They turned towards the house, and, at the sign of the Mother Superior, the rest of the young people followed. They came along in twos and threes laughing and gossiping through the remaining minutes of this precious hour.

The inmates of the convent were mainly French, and it was this fact that threw the doors open to almost every French exile who passed that way. But there had been more than one austere nun who had at first believed little that was good of this lovely woman, arriving in the dead of night and appearing every morning for many days with a tear-stained face and melancholy eyes. 'A penitent,' muttered some, 'who has been no better than she should be.' Many of them cherished strangely distorted ideas about the outer world, and there was perhaps a touch of prudishness in the reception which they gave to poor, weary, travel-stained Elise after her long journey across France and her precarious escape into Switzerland through a closely-watched frontier. But, fortunately for her, the Mother Superior had taken a fancy to her from the first, and by gentle tact and kindness had gradually melted her heart and gained her affection. The friendship gave relief, and the fits of weeping had grown rarer as she found an ear into which she could pour her troubles.

The true loveableness and innate simplicity of the girl's nature began to reappear once more, and thus she had gradually become a general favourite in the convent. The quiet life of this community, touched but rarely by rumours from the outside world, had acted as a soothing anodyne on her confused and troubled spirits, and gradually she emerged from her deep depression and became more at peace with herself. The agony of conflict and doubt seemed to have gone by.

Followed by the crowd of nuns and novices, the Mother Superior and her *protégée* loitered down the long gravel path, which divided the great garden in two, and neared the garden entrance of the large plain white building of the convent, as stern in its architecture as in its internal discipline. They had already put foot on the stone staircase leading up to this doorway when one of the nuns on duty within ran hurriedly down the stairs—plainly in a considerable state of agitation. The Mother Superior looked at her severely, as she just avoided a collision with the ascending group by snatching at the railings and steadying herself.

‘Rushing, as usual, Marie,’ she said. ‘How often have I to tell you that such haste is wrong and inconsistent with your vows.’

Marie, a plump little girl, the pet of the convent, and very far removed from the ordinary

conception of a nun, stood in a state of panting protest.

‘Ah, but, Mother, you do not know how frightened I have been. I heard a ring at the convent door, and I went to the wicket to see who was there, and who do you think it was? Why,’ and she blushed deeply, as if she thought it was hardly right to utter the word, ‘there were two men! They had driven here, and the carriage is waiting—both young men, and one looked—oh, so ill, and sick, and tired, leaning against the arm of the other.’

‘And what did they want here?’ said the Mother Superior, her mouth twitching with amusement at the effect of these apparitions on the younger woman.

‘I—I told them to go away,’ replied Marie, as if she were recording an act of valour, ‘but they would not. They bowed and said they had not any wish to intrude upon our privacy, and that they were conscious of the stigma under which they lay in consequence of the unfortunate sex to which they belonged, but they wished to ask one question. They were Frenchmen who had just escaped from the power of the Directory, and they had heard that a young friend of theirs named Elise Duplay had taken refuge in this convent. If so, they wished to see her; but if they were wrong they were willing to go their way in peace. I know

that I was wrong to listen,' added the young nun, chattering on, 'but they were such nice-spoken young men, and so polite, that I could not find it in my heart to send them away.'

The Mother Superior smiled again at the anxiety exhibited by the child.

'You were quite right,' said she, kindly; 'it is no part of our religion to shut our ears to those who are in trouble. But tell them that we have no such visitant in our convent,' for Elise had been living there under an assumed name—a pardonable deception which she had adopted in order to avoid the gossip of those who might have heard the incidents of Robespierre's downfall.

Marie was about to turn and deliver her message when she suddenly noticed the expression on the face of their strange visitor standing at the side of the Mother Superior. For as she listened to Marie's description of the strangers Elise had been unable to conceal her feelings.

'But perhaps, mademoiselle, our visitor knows who these strangers are?' cried Marie. 'See how pale she is! Are you not well?' she cried, in real distress.

The child's babbling tongue drew the attention of the Mother Superior to Elise, and it was impossible for the girl to hide her agitation.

She determined to throw herself on their confidence. Though their life lay between these

narrow walls, yet they were women. They would understand.

‘What is it, my child? Speak,’ said the Mother Superior, taking her hand. ‘Tell me all.’

‘Ah!’ she cried, ‘you will think me wicked. The name I have given to you is not my real one—it is Elise Duplay. And he who is asking for me is—is—my lover.’

The touch of nature told.

The Mother pressed her hand kindly, kissed her gently, and, after a moment’s reflection, turned to Marie.

‘Go and prepare the ante-room for them to sit in. Let them in, and then, when you have made them comfortable, tell them that Mademoiselle Duplay will come in a few minutes.’

So she spoke, and Marie ran to obey.

A few minutes after, Elise came into the great bare waiting-room, where at rare intervals a few friends and relatives of the nuns and novices were received. It was a great square chamber, and in the middle was a large deal table with a shiny cloth on it. The floor was of bare boards, but scrupulously clean, and the walls and ceiling were both whitewashed. The only touch of luxury in the room was a big armchair, in the recesses of which was now lying a youngish man, apparently in the last stages of disease. His feet were resting on a plain deal chair, which had been evidently

placed there for him by his anxious friend, who was now standing at his side, and chafing his temples with his hand.

The invalid was Louvier, and the friend was the Marquis de Saens.

As her eyes fell on the face of her lover, Elise started, and, with a low, wailing cry, ran across the room and fell on her knees at his side. She hungrily seized his hand and covered it with kisses, passionately crying to him by name.

He flushed with joy at the sound. Half rising from his chair he leant forward, bowed down over her head, and passionately kissed her hair. De Saens turned away, his eyes filled with tears, unable to endure the pathos of the spectacle.

For a few moments there was silence between them. At length it was the girl who broke it.

‘My fault,’ she cried, ‘my fault! Oh, Bertrand, can you ever forgive me?’

‘What is there to forgive, my own love?’ cried Louvier, bending down once more. ‘Have you not suffered too?’

‘I have deserved it all,’ she cried, in a passion of self-reproach. ‘Why did I misunderstand? Why did I make light of your great love?’

With infinite tenderness he had lifted her face, and now, with both hands, he held it while he looked deep into her eyes.

‘Elise,’ he said, very softly, ‘God, who has

put strength into the heart of man, and mercy into the heart of woman, has not made this strange world so ill after all. Often in the night-watches I have thought it all over, and I can now see that if we had joined hands then it would have been an unhallowed union.'

He coughed painfully, but struggled on.

'You were right to refuse. Before we could be happy I had much to expiate. Hate had to go, and now out of all this God has given me one good thing—to look again on your sweet face before I die.'

'Die?' she cried. 'Ah, no!' she cried, passionately, covering his hand with kisses. 'You shall stay here, and I will nurse you back to health.'

He smiled at her ardour, and gently stroked her hair. He knew that he was doomed—the doctors had told him so before he left Paris. The injury done to his lung by the spent bullet at Quiberon had seemed to pass away before De Saens's anxious care, but when the wound healed it had left a permanently damaged organ. One night of exposure in the long journey across France had sufficed to set up hemorrhage, and ever since his arrival in Paris, some three weeks before, he had been getting gradually worse.

When the doctors had at last broken to him that nothing could save him from a rapid decline


and death, he had asked for one last liberty—to be allowed to go into Switzerland and see Elise again before he died. They suggested sending for her, but he would not hear of it. Paris was still, in his eyes, a dangerous place for any of the Duplay family, and though the guillotine had been removed there was still banishment and Guiana in the background.

At last the doctors, seeing that refusal would probably be more dangerous than consent, had given way. Tenderly guided and cared for by De Saens, he had worked his way, by slow stages, across France. But a journey in heavy, clumsy coaches had not been the best thing possible for a man already sick unto death, and Louvier well knew that he was now very near to the end.

But though he knew all this he did not contradict her. Why take away her last illusion? She would know all too soon, poor girl. Besides, he had a task in hand which he must carry out with unclouded brain, and there was no time to waste.

Turning half round in his chair towards De Saens, Louvier beckoned to him with his left hand.

Profoundly moved by the scene before him, and altogether shaken out of that mood of indifference which had been, of old, the shield of his delicate nature, De Saens had been standing some little way apart, trying to help them into an oblivion



of his presence. And, even now, at the wish of his friend, he came forward reluctantly. What had he, a mere tired idler, to do with such scenes as these?

But what followed made him forget all these self-conscious scruples, and, perhaps for the first time in his life, realise what is meant by that fullness of life which is lived in the lives of others.

Elise, too, had risen, sensitive to the upward pressure of Louvier's hand, and conscious of a new purpose dawning in his eyes.

Louvier laid his left hand on De Saens's arm, while with his right he still held the hand of Elise. He spoke slowly and with obvious effort.

'This, Elise, is my dearest friend, and it is my wish that you and he should know one another before I die. Through all perils and sufferings he has been at my side ; he has helped me, saved me, tended me and advised me ; in him have I ever found a protector and guide. When I am gone, he will protect thee also.'

And he laid her right hand in De Saens's.

For a moment, and in the clasp of hand with hand, their eyes met. It was a very grave, wise and helpful look which met the girl's eyes, and made them stay—a look that gave her confidence and strength, and made her feel that, come what might, she would still have a friend left to her on the earth.

She was little conscious of the tumult of feeling through which De Saens was passing. For the gratitude of these two filled him with a kind of passionate self-hatred. He would fain have protested against the praises of his friend, but he shrank from such utterances as a form of selfishness, and relapsed into a humble silence. That so little should earn him so much! That he, whose life had been one long starved abstinence from the real feast of life, should be heaped with praise because, forsooth, for the first time he had sat down to the table and partaken of the repast! It seemed absurd—almost preposterous. He was overwhelmed with that self-contempt which is the growing pain of the soul within.

Lacking expression in words, these feelings found a healthier outlet in growth of human pity and strong resolve. Looking on the two stricken figures before him, he felt a passionate desire to help and to save. This solemn trust of his friend seemed to him a kind of sacrament for his new life. He would not prove unworthy of the trust.

Here, at last, his search for a new earth to win and a new Heaven to conquer had found its issue—a simple human issue in the helping of two souls, cast near to him in the storm and wreck of life. For the first time, that heavy weight on his heart which had resisted all the culture of the schools

and all the dreams of statesmen, seemed to grow lighter. *His* America was here.

The noblest aspirations are intertwined with the simplest human passions, and who shall say that if the girl before him had looked less beautiful, or if she had gazed into his eyes with an expression less pitiful, De Saens would have felt thus? Pity, we are told, is akin to love, and afterwards De Saens dated the first beginnings of a larger life from the same day as the first dawning of a new passion, destined to purify and strengthen him until the end.

It was Louvier who next broke the silence. Leaning forward, he spoke with singular intensity, as if he knew that he had but a short time to utter what he wished to say. Both with common accord leant down towards him, and the girl passed her arm round his weak frame, supporting him in an almost upright posture in the chair.

‘Elise,’ he whispered, ‘this is the only protector that you will have when I am gone. Your father has fled from France, your mother and sisters are scattered. Except for him you will be alone.’

He was becoming exhausted, and sank back again in the chair. But still he seemed to have something more to say, and it was piteous to watch his intense anxiety to give it expression.

‘There is one thing,’ he went on, ‘which I could above all desire—but that lies between you and

him. You must promise me, Elise, that you will not stay here. I would not have thee a cloistered nun. Go to Geneva until Paris is safe for thee.'

As he finished speaking a strange pallor crept over his face, and he shut his eyes as if in the last extremity of exhaustion. A strange shudder seemed to sweep through him, and, worst sign of all, a few specks of blood appeared on his lips. A low wail burst from Elise, but once more he signed to her as if he wished to say a last word. She bent down her ear close to his lips and listened intently. She would never afterwards say what were the precise words that he spoke, but they were sacred to her, and she treasured them in her heart.

Then he signed to his friend as if he wished to give him, too, a last message ; but ere he could speak a hideous flood of blood, welling up from the lungs in this last hemorrhage, broke from his lips. Before either could speak again he had ceased to breathe.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DAWN

THE good convent folk, full of pity at the sudden tragedy within their walls, subscribed from their slender funds and gave a worthy burial to all that remained of Louvier. For several weeks, too, they gave loving harbourage to the stricken girl, whose life seemed thus to have lost its very flower. And all this time De Saens tenderly watched over her, fulfilling to the letter the will of his dead friend, but, with careful tact, never obtruding his own personality at this season of stress and storm.

And then, when the first grief had passed, he escorted her—accompanied by the kindly Mother Superior—to a small house which he had secured in the suburbs of Geneva. There she stayed for several months, and he, still never pushing his claims, carefully guarded her—pretending that he was detained in the town by urgent business, which enabled him to visit her from time to time.

And there, in her bruised heart, scorched by this heavy loss, gradually sprang up the tender blossom of a second regard. At first it was scarcely distinguishable from gratitude, but it grew with the waning of her grief, and seemed to become intertwined with the memory and the message of him whom she had lost, clinging round it like some beautiful ivy that at once feeds and is fed. Not with the strength of the tree itself, but with a strength perhaps all the more beautiful for the hint of weakness in its reliance on another, Elise once more loved.

But for two years no word of love passed between them.

And then at last, in the fulness of time, De Saens asked for the meed of her life-long trust. Not with the hesitating self-doubt of his earlier moods did he advance to take the prize, but with the strong, modest confidence that had grown up with the habit of help and protection.

And, remembering Louvier's dying words, she consented. So it happened that nearly three years after Louvier's death they were married.

But they had seen too much of human misery and human frailty to greatly long for the life of cities. For some time before he left England, De Saens had received from France, through a faithful friend, such remnants of his original fortune as could be saved from the general

wreck. These he had carefully treasured, but he scarcely needed them; for with his large experience and compulsory practice there had grown up in him a literary faculty far above the common. While in Geneva, he wrote and published a book of meditations on the Revolution, which gained him almost immediate fame, and placed him beyond the vicissitudes of financial fortune. With the proceeds of his pen and the interest from his fortune, they were able to purchase a small house not far from Vevey.

And so, on the shores of the broad lake, they lived and laboured, far removed from the roar of life—except when, from distant cities, there reached them the low murmur of applause as the great world received his writings with acclaim. And as the years went by children came to bless their union, and the small house in which they first lodged became too restricted to hold their hostages to fortune. So they moved into a larger dwelling-place, and those years of conflict and storm, during which Napoleon swept like a portent over Europe, left them untouched in the same blessed calm. In vain did the great potentate endeavour to attract De Saens back to his native country in order to lend the light of genius to his Court. Against his world-weariness Napoleon's mighty will broke in vain.

And so the dream, that Louvier had dreamt

in the prison of La Force, came true. But the face which with but dimly prophetic eye he had tried to read in the midst of dreamland revealed itself, in the long working of the fates, to be the face of a friend. And friendship has this mystic touch—that through our friends we seem to prolong our own lives. If Louvier himself died, surely we can say that it was not altogether a different self, but in some senses another ‘I,’ that took his place, and carried on his works and days.

THE END

3

5

6

Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 022 369 461

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
CECIL H. GREEN LIBRARY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004
(415) 723-1493

All books may be recalled after 7 days

DATE DUE



